



# THE OPTIMISM ADVANTAGE

50 Simple Truths to Transform Your  
Attitudes and Actions into Results

**TERRY L. PAULSON, PhD**



## Praise for *The Optimism Advantage*

“In life we have controllables and uncontrollables. Dr. Terry Paulson does a masterful job in *The Optimism Advantage* of supporting the thesis that we control our attitude and our actions. Read and study every chapter of this book and you will increase the probability of having a great life of happiness and achievement!”

—Don Hutson, coauthor of the #1 *New York Times* Best-Seller,  
*The One Minute Entrepreneur*; and CEO of U.S. Learning,  
Memphis, TN

“Terry Paulson is refreshing in that he teaches what he practices. His panoramic view of the research on optimism coupled with his thoughtful insight and experiences as a psychologist make this a book we can all benefit from reading. He goes beyond hyperbole and hype to address the principles and practices of optimism.”

—Mark Sanborn, Leadership Expert and Author of *The Fred Factor*,  
*You Don't Need a Title to be a Leader*, and *The Encore Effect*

“I am optimistic that this book will be a best seller. Henry Ford once said, ‘*Whether you think you can or whether you think you can't, you're right.*’ Terry Paulson’s newest book, *The Optimism Advantage*, will show you how you can see the opportunity in every encounter!”

—Dr. Tony Alessandra, Author of *Charisma*,  
and Hall-of-Fame Keynote Speaker

“Terry Paulson’s book *The Optimism Advantage* reminds us that optimism is a learned skill. This book is not the traditional self-help hype but a book that provides tried-and-true principles that inspire personal responsibility for living the life you have always dreamed about, as only an optimist can do. I thoroughly enjoyed this book and plan on having my 13-year-old daughter read it as well.”

—Jodi Walker, CSP, Professional Speaker and  
Author of *Share A Kind Word: How to Use the Infinite  
Power of Words to Enhance Your Life  
at Home and at Work*

“Shifting one’s perspective in life requires more than a positive attitude. Rather, it’s an approach to living with optimism and ambition. Dr. Terry Paulson lays out a clear and attainable vision for purposeful and joyous living. His tremendous expertise and meaningful insights contribute measurably to this insightful book.”

—Dr. Nido Qubein, President, High Point University,  
and Chairman, Great Harvest Bread Company

“No psycho-babble here. Paulson puts it plainly and pleasantly: Life as a leader, boss, parent, partner, or spouse can drive you crazy unless you master your attitudes and actions. His book provides the perfect prescription.”

—Dianna Booher, Author of *The Voice of Authority: 10 Communication Strategies Every Leader Needs to Know* and *Booher’s Rules of Business Grammar: 101 Fast and Easy Ways to Correct the Most Common Errors*

“This book is about creating personal hope, filled with lessons and truths that will inspire you to not just believe, but confirm that the glass is more than half full.”

—Shep Hyken, Best-Selling Author of *The Cult of the Customer*

“What an important book for such a time as this! This is not just a simple self help book that says to think differently—Terry tells us how to actually take the steps to change your attitude and your life. To live and to succeed, this is a must read.”

—Bert Decker, CEO, Decker Communications, Inc.

“This is the best time for you to take advantage of what Terry has to say about optimism. He is the master, and this book is a must! Don’t let setbacks keep you from the progress you deserve.”

—Thomas J. Winninger, Founder of Winninger Institute for Market Resilience, Author of six books, including *Get Out of the Boat: Discover the Purpose of Your Life*

“Results! That’s the key that Terry Paulson shares in *The Optimism Advantage*. This book is filled with more than *Truths*. It actually shows you how to turn those *Truths* into *Results*. If you’re stuck, this book is the starter’s pistol. Pull the trigger—buy it—read it—get results.”

—W Mitchell, CPAE, ’08–’09 President of the  
Global Speakers Federation

"*The Optimism Advantage* will motivate and inspire you to do your best and be your best, no matter what's happening around you, no matter your current circumstances. I highly recommend it."

—Robert B. Tucker,  
Author of *Innovation Is Everybody's Business*

"Optimism can be a chosen habit and a learned skill. Take Dr. Paulson's message to heart and learn to cultivate a healthier, more productive mindset. In all challenges we can learn to see opportunities. We can learn to overcome the emotions of gloom and guide others to a better path. Make this *your* advantage; read this book often!"

—Jim Cathcart, Author of *Relationship Intelligence*®

"*The Optimism Advantage* is clear, succinct, and has great transferable concepts that the reader can implement immediately. This is a valuable resource for professionals and leaders alike."

—H. James Zinger, CSP, President, Hymovation, Inc.

"*The Optimism Advantage* is a must read! This landmark book may be the most important book you read this year. Each chapter is a road map to navigate current circumstances and take dominion of both attitude and actions. Important truths spring alive with profound stories and are then made actionable. Read this book and discover a more deeply fulfilling life."

—Eli Davidson, M.A., Reinvention Expert,  
International Best-Selling Author of *Funky to Fabulous*

"A leader's job is to keep hope alive. Before executives can ever expect to inspire others, they have to manage their own attitudes and actions. *The Optimism Advantage* gives leaders all the practical insights and ammunition they need to maintain a positive attitude and energize every communication."

—Patricia Fripp, Keynote Speaker and Executive Speech Coach

"In order to turn your setbacks into comebacks, it will take faith, focus, and follow through . . . and all these require the power of optimism! Terry Paulson has written a book that will change your inlook, uplook, and outlook! Read *The Optimism Advantage* and tell all your friends to read it! You will change your life and the lives of those you love! I highly recommend this book!"

—Willie Jolley, author of *Turn Setbacks into Greenbacks:  
7 Secrets for Going Up in Down Times*



# **THE OPTIMISM ADVANTAGE**





# THE OPTIMISM ADVANTAGE

50 Simple Truths to  
*Transform Your Attitudes*  
and  
*Actions into Results*

T E R R Y L . P A U L S O N , P h D



WILEY

John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Copyright © 2010 Terry L. Paulson. All rights reserved.

Published by John Wiley & Sons, Inc., Hoboken, New Jersey.

Published simultaneously in Canada.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning, or otherwise, except as permitted under Section 107 or 108 of the 1976 United States Copyright Act, without either the prior written permission of the Publisher, or authorization through payment of the appropriate per-copy fee to the Copyright Clearance Center, Inc., 222 Rosewood Drive, Danvers, MA 01923, (978) 750-8400, fax (978) 646-8600, or on the web at [www.copyright.com](http://www.copyright.com). Requests to the Publisher for permission should be addressed to the Permissions Department, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 111 River Street, Hoboken, NJ 07030, (201) 748-6011, fax (201) 748-6008, or online at <http://www.wiley.com/go/permissions>.

**Limit of Liability/Disclaimer of Warranty:** While the publisher and author have used their best efforts in preparing this book, they make no representations or warranties with respect to the accuracy or completeness of the contents of this book and specifically disclaim any implied warranties of merchantability or fitness for a particular purpose. No warranty may be created or extended by sales representatives or written sales materials. The advice and strategies contained herein may not be suitable for your situation. You should consult with a professional where appropriate. Neither the publisher nor author shall be liable for any loss of profit or any other commercial damages, including but not limited to special, incidental, consequential, or other damages.

For general information on our other products and services or for technical support, please contact our Customer Care Department within the United States at (800) 762-2974, outside the United States at (317) 572-3993, or fax (317) 572-4002.

Wiley also publishes its books in a variety of electronic formats. Some content that appears in print may not be available in electronic books. For more information about Wiley products, visit our web site at [www.wiley.com](http://www.wiley.com).

***Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data:***

Paulson, Terry L., 1945–

The optimism advantage: 50 simple truths to transform your attitudes and actions into results/by Terry L. Paulson.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-470-55475-3 (cloth)

1. Optimism. 2. Attitude (Psychology) I. Title.

BF698.35.O57P38 2010

153.1—dc22

2009038778

Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

---

# CONTENTS

---

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	xi
CHAPTER 1 Trade Being Your Own Worst Enemy to Become Your Own Best Supporter	1
CHAPTER 2 Deal with the Hand You're Dealt	14
CHAPTER 3 Your Choice: Victim or Resilient Survivor	25
CHAPTER 4 The Optimistic Power of Purpose	39
CHAPTER 5 Optimists Update Their Gifts into Recyclable Assets	52
CHAPTER 6 Your Health Habits Impact Your Attitude	65
CHAPTER 7 Optimists Embrace Action	73
CHAPTER 8 Optimists Dispute Catastrophic Thoughts	83
CHAPTER 9 Optimists Give Thanks for Gratitude	102
CHAPTER 10 Optimists Provide Constructive Self-Criticism	114

**x Contents**

CHAPTER 11	Managing Your Own Motivation Means Catching Yourself Being Effective	129
CHAPTER 12	Simple Pleasures: The Optimist's Wild Card	139
CHAPTER 13	Humor Is the Joker in the Hand of Life	152
CHAPTER 14	Build an Optimistic Network That Works	164
CHAPTER 15	How to Become Optimistic in Life . . . by Really Trying	179
RESOURCES		199
INDEX		202
ABOUT THE AUTHOR		211

---

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

---

**T**his book is a culmination of personal and professional experiences, and study over the years. As such, there are many to acknowledge for their contribution.

For my parents, Ann and Homer, who challenged me with loving encouragement, modeled optimism every day, and made laughter and faith welcome companions on our family's joy ride through life, thank you for shaping and encouraging my optimistic attitude.

For my wife, Lorie, son, Sean, grandchildren, Micah, Jeremiah, Naomi and Chloe, and other members of my whacky and wonderful family, thank you for teaching me that the relationships you have in life make the ride worthwhile. Thanks for the love, memories, and the experiences yet to come.

For the thousands of audiences who have graced me with their presence, attention, laughter, applause, insights, and stories, thank you for helping me fill this book with tested insights that make a difference. You have taught me much of the wisdom I value and share.

For my speaking colleagues from Speakers Roundtable, Gold Coast Speakers, and the National Speakers Association, thank you for your years of inspiration, collaborative support, engaging quotes, and encouragement. You are the hope merchants who provide the motivation and messages that help others live their dreams and invent a better future.

For Nancy Lefkowitz, who has provided the steady office grounding, needed editing, and business support that made this work possible, thank you for your years of friendship and service.

## **xii Acknowledgments**

For the team at John Wiley & Sons, Inc., my editor, Lauren Lynch, and production editor, Lauren Freestone, thank you for optimistically nurturing this title from conception to publishing birth. I knew that your compliments, criticisms, and deadlines were evidence of caring enough to produce a product we can all be proud of.

For Dr. Martin Seligman for the pioneering and continuing work he has inspired and completed in the study of positive psychology. More than merely understanding pathology, his work and leadership have challenged us to understand and promote constructive mental health habits.

Finally, I thank God for his sustaining grace and empowering presence in my life. You fuel my purpose, affirm my value, and give me an enduring hope. Thank you for providing faith in a community that's always there for us. To God be the glory in all that I do.

# Trade Being Your Own Worst Enemy to Become Your Own Best Supporter

*“Get busy living, or get busy dying!”*

—Morgan Freeman as “Red” in *The Shawshank Redemption*

**E**very book has a beginning, so let’s start where every book ought to begin—what’s in it for you?

I’m assuming that you picked up this book because you want practical insights you can use right away to better your life on and off the job. You want to be affirmed for what you do well, and you want to be better for having invested the time in reading this book.

You also read self-help books to know that you’re not alone. You want to know that you’re not the only one who struggles with making life work, and you want a few new, tried-and-true insights that you can use to make your life’s journey just a little more satisfying and successful.

## 2 The Optimism Advantage

"I prepare for the tough times by reading biographies. It reminds me that famous people never had it easy. Their lives are all stories of people who had to overcome obstacles over and over again. In his first court experience, the judge told Richard Nixon that he was the worst prepared lawyer he'd ever seen. George Patton was dyslexic and graduated last in his class at West Point. They persevered; I have to persevere!"

—Randy Voeltz

We're facing some challenging circumstances, and people are looking for positive answers. Every age has its share of struggles, but when the tough times hit, they have a way of getting everyone's attention.

Facing continued downsizing and more layoffs, a manager at one of my leadership training events added a sharper edge to an enduring cliché: "When they hired me, I *was* promised a rose garden. But they forgot to tell me that these rosebushes have some pretty nasty thorns. I hope you're

going to provide some pruning shears to help me find a way out of this mess!" When you're encountering difficult situations, you want answers. When life gives you a headache, you want something to take away the pain, and you want to avoid getting another one!

Although you'll find plenty of useful answers and practical advice in this book, getting advice is probably not your primary problem. You've received more than your share of good advice from other authors, friends, teachers, and passing gurus. The challenge lies in *making* that good advice work for your life and your career. That's why this book won't coddle you; it'll challenge you with some unsettling truth telling that's designed to help you transform your attitudes, relationships, habits, and choices. Those changes will help you experience the optimism advantage. But for optimism to work, you have to do the work to think and act differently!

### Truth #1: Life Is Difficult

The first truth in the great game of life is worth memorizing—life is difficult! So get over it. No sweet-talking politician, fairy godmother, or genie is coming to sprinkle stardust or grant three wishes. Embracing optimism is about embracing self-reliance, personal responsibility, and



the work of changing your thought patterns and your actions. It doesn't mean that you're denying reality; it's simply about positively coping with that reality to succeed in the face of life's challenges.

If you're lucky, you had parents, teachers, and bosses who cared enough to let you experience the natural consequences of your choices. They expected a lot from you. They also encouraged you, but they didn't give you grades you didn't deserve. They let you win and lose on your own. They made you cope with your own falls and failures and earn the rewards you received.

Protective cocoons may work for caterpillars, but they don't work for people. Shielding children from all of life's natural pains and setbacks doesn't allow them to gain the confidence that they need to cope with the even bigger challenges they will face later in life. In the great game of business, there is no eighth-place trophy for a salesperson who loses a critical account to a competitor. If the quality of your product or service is substandard, you don't get a passing grade. You lose the business.

So if you think optimism means adopting a Pollyanna mind-set where everything turns out right, then you've got the wrong idea. That's simply self-help hype! *True* optimists have

"What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared with what lies within us."

—Oliver Wendell Holmes

earned their positive attitude from a proven track record of overcoming real obstacles. They did it the old-fashioned way; they earned confidence one obstacle, one challenge, and one victory at a time!

If you are to become a true optimist, start by being a realist. Accept that life is difficult, and then get busy learning as much as you can about the challenges you face. Why? Because you've overcome problems in the past, you have every reason to believe that you've got what it takes to overcome whatever problems life deals you.

## **Life Is a Self-Help Project, but You're Not Working on It Alone**

Developing maturity at any age is all about realizing that life is essentially a self-help project. Now, that's a good thing, because it's

## 4 The Optimism Advantage

*your* life. How you define success, nurture your own education and career, respond to your problems, and make your choices allows you to shape your life the way you want it lived. That's both a life-affirming opportunity and a personal responsibility, but, as you realize, it also comes with your share of frustrating challenges. As an optimist, you'd want it no other way.

But optimists are not alone, and neither are you. Contacts in your local community, family, professional network, and fellow members of your faith community can help you make your way on life's journey. Although all of these people can support you, it's up to you to develop and tap those resources. Optimists don't merely settle for the relationships that find them. To claim your own optimism advantage, you need to realize who matters, who never did, who shouldn't anymore, who still does, and who you want to add to your team. The bottom line is simple: Seek out relationships that encourage and support the person you want to be.

Self-reliance doesn't require you to discount or dismiss the importance of others. It's simply about building healthy relationships that work for both parties. If you give value, you usually get value. Good relationships are like deposit systems in many ways; you tend to get back what you put in. Perhaps it doesn't always happen immediately, or in exactly the way you expected, but when you find a way to do your part to serve others, people have a tendency to serve you back. When you help a small, struggling customer when they are growing, they may just remember you when they're big and profitable. In short, take time to cultivate the right relationships, and you'll soon become more optimistic and accomplish more on and off the job.

### **Optimists Everywhere Claim Their Version of the American Dream**

For people of every age and in every country, the optimistic belief that they can have a dream and make it happen has become a powerful source of hope and motivation. As the United States has become the influential nation that it is today, the importance of self-reliance in achieving personal dreams has been reinforced over and

over again. The history of our country is ripe with stories of individual Americans who took risks, overcame challenges, bounced back from setbacks, and earned their own version of the American Dream.

This in no way limits the dreams of other world citizens. After I mentioned the American Dream at a leadership presentation in Singapore, an apology seemed appropriate for what some might label a clear *diversity disaster!* But a manager from

“Children everywhere need the encouragement to dream big dreams. I’d like to think we could help them do just that. I love hearing the excitement in their voices when they realize they can do something new.”

—Tiger Woods

Hong Kong addressed my concern when he announced to all in attendance: “Please remember that the American Dream is not just your dream; it’s the world’s dream. The world looks to America and hopes that they, too, can have the freedoms and the opportunities you can easily take for granted. You have no need to apologize for referring to the American Dream. Please protect it for all of us.”

Throughout the world today, free, optimistic people everywhere share a version of that dream. Many do everything within their power to come to America to achieve it. Some wait years for a visa; others cross treacherous borders. In America, the gate swings in, because opportunities still remain. You certainly don’t meet a lot of people trying to get out!

Rest assured that no matter what the country, *hope* is a sweet-sounding word in any language. Even in the toughest economic times, some world citizens find ways to do quite well. Instead of watching the negative drone of bad news, people with an optimistic attitude and a compelling dream get busy taking advantage of available opportunities. Instead of worrying about the global economy, they get busy making an impact on their own personal economy one day at a time.

This book is full of hope, optimism, and suggestions on what you can do to live your dreams—dreams that don’t always involve big paychecks or newspaper headlines. Many millionaires who

## 6 The Optimism Advantage

were B and C students were the ones who had the guts to start a small business, live in a nice little house, and save more than they spend. They live frugally and are very self-confident and self-sufficient.

Challenge yourself to become one of these dreamers. To deliver on that dream, you're going to have to get down to work! Success *does* come, but often, it doesn't come easy!

### Choose Learned Optimism over Learned Helplessness

If this is getting a bit too optimistic for you to believe, then maybe you've already fallen victim to what has been called the depression of our age, *learned helplessness*. This depression comes from the belief that nothing you can do will better your situation. Modern-day living has a way of reinforcing how little you control and making it far too easy to become a victim.

Victims feel that they can't do anything to make a difference in what happens to them. Since they have no confidence in their own ability to cope with adversity and earn their own success, they avoid seemingly useless constructive actions, preferring instead to wait for fate to deal its hand. Both their headaches and their happiness come from what happens to them, instead of as a result of their own actions. Victims look for ways to blame those who contribute to their pain.

"Everything can be taken from a man but one thing . . . to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances."

—Viktor Frankl

Optimists are the opposite of victims. With positive attitudes built on a personal track record of overcoming adversity, they believe in their own ability to achieve their goals

and overcome whatever obstacles hinder them. When dealt a poor hand, they look for ways to play it well. They take pride in their achievements and look forward to life's challenges.

The choice is yours. You can trade your victim thinking and learned helplessness for the optimistic attitudes and actions that will help you develop your own resilience, persistence, resourcefulness,

and results. Every page you read and every step you take to alter your thinking will make you more optimistic.

## The Study of Optimism and a New Emphasis on Positive Psychology

Some refer to him as the father of positive psychology, but whatever you call him, you can't talk about *learned optimism* without giving credit to the pioneer who provided the vision, the early research, and the road map on how to apply the truths discovered. Martin E. P. Seligman, PhD, is a psychologist, a University of Pennsylvania professor, the author of *Learned Optimism* and *Authentic Happiness*, and a past president of the American Psychological Association. His earlier works are well worth reading, and his insights will be evident throughout this book.

Before Seligman became president of the American Psychological Association in 1997, an analysis of negative versus positive topics in psychology journals from 1967 to 1997 found 41,416 references on anxiety, 54,040 on depression, 1,710 on happiness, and 415 on joy. It was time to balance the books by studying and learning more from the resilient souls who seem to cope with stress—and effectively and consistently handle the demands placed on them both on and off the job.

When he became APA president, Seligman challenged psychologists to increase their study of positive psychology. Historically, psychologists had learned a lot about mental illness and how people break down in the face of life's challenges. But why do some in

“Psychology has, since World War II, focused on the question of how can we cure mental illness? It's done very well. There are by my count at least 14 mental illnesses which we can now treat or relieve, either with psychotherapy or with drugs. But that's half the battle. We've ignored the other side, which is to ask: How can we take what we are strongest at and build them up in such a way that they become great buffers against our troubles?”

—Martin E. P. Seligman

## 8 The Optimism Advantage

the same situations remain resilient, resourceful, and optimistic? Seligman wanted researchers to find out.

So *can* you change your attitude and your actions to become more optimistic? You bet you can! Researchers have shown that you can significantly alter the way you think and act and become more like the optimist you want to be.

At one of my presentations on the optimism advantage, a woman approached me after the program and confessed, “I wish I had your attitude.” My reply was immediate: “Take it. Your taking my attitude certainly won’t stop me from keeping mine!”

### Star in Your Own Positive Soap Opera

Unfortunately, claiming your own optimism advantage takes more than the mere decision to do so. It requires a long history of changing how you think and act. This isn’t a movie that’s all wrapped up in a fancy bow in two hours. This is a soap opera, and you’re the only star who counts. Your challenge as you read this book and apply the insights learned is to make your life’s soap opera as positive as possible. As already discussed, you’ll want to fill your cast with

“Make a point that you will not sign up, line up, or whine up about the recession. Instead, stand up and fight for your dreams and goals, and never, ever give up on you and the incredible possibilities that are within you!”

—Willie Jolley

people who will encourage and support you, and steer clear of those who belittle and doubt you.

Like any soap opera, there’ll be challenges, setbacks, victories, defeats, laughter, tears, joy, grief, record profits, and sizable losses. Your job is to keep making progress in claim-

ing the life you want to live, one day at a time, one choice at a time. This book will help you write your positive script and find your supportive cast of characters.

Why is this book a must-read at this point in your life? Some clichés are so wise that they’re worth repeating: “Today is the first day of the rest of your life!” Life is way too precious to waste boring yourself

in an existence that isn't satisfying, and there's no time like the present to take responsibility for changing your situation. Waiting won't make it any easier, and it won't make success any more likely.

Stop being your own worst enemy and start becoming your own best advocate. Take the time to learn how to trade your negative thoughts and unproductive worries for the positive attitudes and constructive actions that will help you produce winning results.

## Truth #2: Control What You Can, and Accept and Use What You Can't

Cultivating optimistic attitudes and actions is this book's focus, but one of its guiding truths comes from what has been affectionately called the Serenity Prayer, a simple but powerful statement that was written by theologian Reinhold Niebuhr. Taken aback by the impact of his words, he confessed in *The Essential Reinhold Niebuhr: Selected Essays and Addresses*: "The embarrassment, particularly, was occasioned by the incessant correspondence about a prayer I had composed years before, which the old Federal Council of Churches had used and which later was printed on small cards to give to soldiers. Subsequently Alcoholics Anonymous adopted it as its official prayer. The prayer reads: 'God, give us grace to accept with serenity the things that cannot be changed, courage to change the things that should be changed, and the wisdom to distinguish the one from the other.'"

The Serenity Prayer has been shortened, memorized, and repeated privately and publicly—because it captures important truths that *work*. Treasured statements like these that stand the test of time deliver wisdom with a simplicity that makes every word count. Whether you believe in God or not, this book will help you appreciate the value and depth of this statement and the sentiments it promotes.

As an optimist in training, you must learn how to accept and maximize your reaction to the both the blessings and the adversity that come your way and take responsibility for managing your own motivation, attitudes, and actions in a way that makes a difference in the quality of your life.

## Optimism Is Important on and off the Job

Optimism can have a profound impact on both your personal life and your professional life. Graduating with a doctorate in clinical psychology prepares men and women to provide therapy, but it seldom teaches therapists to appreciate the importance of one's work life to one's mental health. Therapists are ready to deal with abusive parents and struggling marriages, but what about bosses and dysfunctional teams who can drive someone crazy? Both worlds are important to you and to this book because optimism can make a difference to you in both situations.

“Perpetual optimism is a force multiplier.”

—Colin Powell

A leader without influence and an ability to drive strategic change really isn't a leader. A professional who can't trans-

late her gifts and skills into results that serve won't last in this competitive global economy. To be effective in either role requires you to have the right skills, the right attitudes, and the right motivation. And while advancing in your career and making a difference for those you serve is important, there is more to life than work. Few people would want on their tombstone: “I finished everything on my to-do-list!” Life is about cultivating good relationships, being a good parent or partner, making a difference to your community—and, most important, enjoying the journey.

Everyone complains about the difficulty of finding the right work-life balance. Maintaining such a stable balance will always require a healthy tension that appreciates the importance of both areas of your life. Honor the importance of achievement and business results, and honor the importance of lasting and satisfying relationships with those you love. This book is committed to helping you do both.

## Faith and Faith Communities Can Impact Your Optimism

The month before making a presentation to an executive forum at a major national newspaper, *One Minute Manager* author Ken Blanchard had presented to the same group. Executives were still talking about one of his comments.



“Ken’s program was exceptional,” the meeting planner confessed. “But it was his response to a question that had people talking. During the Q&A, one of the executives asked, ‘You spend your life motivating audiences. How do you motivate yourself?’”

“I’m so glad you asked,” Ken replied with a smile. “Every morning I rise early for time to study the Word of God and for prayer. I know faith is important to many. For me, faith centers and motivates me in a way that nothing else can.”

That simple, authentic disclosure about how faith affected Blanchard’s life and attitude surprised and challenged many of the executives present. It gave them permission to discuss more openly the role spiritual faith played in their own lives.

Although not a primary focus of this book, research and surveys have found that religious faith has consistently been a reliable source of hope and opti-

mism for many people. For centuries, believers have written and witnessed to its impact in their lives. To leave out references to the difference faith and faith communities can have on your attitudes and actions would not do justice to the breadth of insights available to you. Explore this area of life for yourself, and never discount its importance to many very optimistic believers.

“In our study, we looked at 11 major religions in America and how hopeful and optimistic the adherents were. We looked at the level of optimism in stories the children were told, as well as in the liturgy and sermons. We found strict Calvinists, Roman Catholics and Orthodox Jews were the most hopeful and optimistic, while Unitarians and Reformed Jews tended to be more pessimistic. The fundamentalist religions simply seem to offer more hope for a brighter future than do the more liberal, humanistic ones.”

—Martin E. P. Seligman

## **Don’t Just Read This Book—Devour It**

Remember: The books you buy and put on the shelf won’t affect your thinking or your life. This book is full of proven strategies that work,

## 12 The Optimism Advantage

“All truly wise thoughts have been thought already thousands of times; but to make them truly ours, we must think them over again honestly, until they take root in our personal experience.”

—Goethe

but strategies don’t work unless you use them. Start by promising to devour this book. Write in the margins. Test and use the strategies that make sense to you, consistently, over time—until they become habits.

Don’t just read this book once; that is a lesson my grand-

mother imparted to me when I was very young. With sparkling eyes and an inquisitive mind, she nurtured her children’s offspring with stories and quotes that left a lasting legacy. She often gave us her version of a Swedish massage, and while working my back, she would share quotes and Scripture from memory. I once asked her, “How do you remember so many quotes?”

Grandma Vera said something I’ve treasured since: “If you read something often enough, no one can take it away from you.”

How many great books have you underlined and treasured but never read again? If you were to bet on this book or on years of negative thinking habits, which would you bet on? The good money in Vegas is on your past habits. The only way you change that is to diligently nurture and review content that will provide you the ammunition and encouragement for the changes you want to make.

Don’t just read this book; reread the chapters that speak to what you need to change. Summarize what you’ve learned for your friends and family. Share your favorite short quotes and key statements on your social networking websites. By doing so, you can become a force for positive change for all your friends. When you risk being contagious for what’s working for you, you’ll soon find you’re practicing and remembering what you’re sharing!

One final note: I promise not to bore you with lengthy references or scientific jargon. I’ll even add some timely humor, relevant stories you can relate to, and inspiring quotes to keep you turning the pages.

I've written this book to provide you with examples and tools you can use now to make a difference in your at-

titude and your life. It's self-help-lite, and it's word-reduced to make it a quick and worthwhile read. With that in mind, let's get on to the next chapter.

"The future belongs to those  
who show up for it."

—Mark Steyn

# Deal with the Hand You're Dealt

*“If you’re too consumed with the one door in your life that closes, you’ll never reach the open door.”*

—Tommy Lasorda

**L**ife deals you both bad and good hands. You—and countless others—struggle with the tough times and can easily take for granted life’s many blessings. As an optimist, you’ll learn to play both well.

You don’t need this book to tell you that life is difficult; that truth is impossible to avoid. After all, the bad hands are the ones that tend to get your attention. Even when the worst happens to others, we often say, “But by the grace of God go I!” In short, that could have just as easily been you or me!

The late M. Scott Peck’s transforming work, *The Road Less Traveled*, continues to sell thousands of books every year. It starts with an affirmation of the same assertion: “Life is difficult. This is a great truth, one of the greatest truths. It is a great truth

because once we truly see this truth, we transcend it. Once we truly know that life is difficult—once we truly understand and accept it—then life is no longer difficult. Because once it is accepted, the fact that life is difficult no longer matters.”

Everybody has and will continue to experience bad days—an unwelcome diagnosis, a stock market fall, a terminated job, a lost loved one, a game you should have won, personal rejections, customers who go to a competitor, and natural disasters you couldn't have planned for. You hope for more, but you aren't thrown by less because we are all in this together.

“The business world's most revered figures, from Bill Gates on down, almost invariably overcame overwhelming odds. They didn't surf easily to the top on a big societal wave of applause. In fact, they spent most of their pre-success years being shouted down by naysayers. Yet they persisted. It was incredibly hard, and that's the whole point: I'm not saying that it's not as easy to succeed as it used to be. I'm saying it never was.”

—Rob Walker

## Why Do Bad Things Happen to Good People?

For centuries, people have struggled with a vexing question: “If there is a just and all-powerful God, why do bad things happen to good people?” Books have been written to explore this difficult question. Some reject faith, because no answer seems adequate. Others choose to trust that God has a plan they will someday understand. Still others look for the good that may emerge through facing the adversity with optimism, courage, and faith. But through all the mental and emotional gymnastics that facing reality requires, the fact remains that bad things do happen to good people!

Years ago, a cancer survivor shared with a friend his struggle with the question

“The God I believe in does not send us the problem; he gives us the strength to cope with it.”

—Rabbi Harold S. Kushner

“Why me?” After a moment’s silence, his friend asked, “Did you ever think to ask yourself ‘Why not me?’” It had never occurred to him to even ask that question.

That question unleashed a liberating insight. He realized that life is neither fair nor unfair; it’s simply life. Bad things can happen to anyone. “Why me?” assumes I should be exempt from the pain everyone else feels. “Why not me?” is humbling and appropriate. It introduces us to the reality that life’s challenges happen to everyone. Difficult days are facts of life, but learning to deal well with those difficult times can help you become stronger.

### Find Perspective and Get on with Life

“In the middle of difficulty lies opportunity.”

—Albert Einstein

Faced with a diagnosis of Parkinson’s Disease, award-winning actor and author of *Always Looking Up* Michael J.

Fox had to find a way to accept this painful reality and continue to make the best of his life. When commenting on his optimistic attitude in an ABC special, Michael said, “The answer had very little to do with protection and everything to do with perspective. The only unavailable choice was whether or not to have Parkinson’s. Everything else was up to me. I could concentrate on the loss or just get on with life and maybe see if the holes started filling in for themselves.”

Michael’s optimistic journey from adversity to a renewed appreciation for life can be applied to your life as well. As bad as his disease can be, Fox found a way to make it a gift. Taken with the right perspective, even adversity can be a blessing that opens unseen doors and a new appreciation for life. When we are confronted by death, disease, or an accident, the value of a day takes on an entirely new meaning.

### Disappointment Can Launch New Dreams

You don’t have to face a terminal diagnosis to appreciate the perspective gained by failure and setbacks. Experienced sales professionals have

learned the hard way the importance of staying in the game to earn the sale. To the best sales professionals, “NO” is just “ON” spelled backwards!

“Experience is not what happens to you. It is what you do with what happens to you.”  
—Aldous Huxley

When my teenage son, Sean, asked if I’d give him a car, I quickly replied, “No.” He immediately protested, “Everyone gets a car!” And I replied, “That will be everyone minus one!” His face said it all. I’m sure he was wondering how unfortunate he was to be born to this father!

But Sean persisted. With his birthday coming up, he decided to settle for even a partial payment. He asked how much I would give him toward his car for a birthday present. I responded with a borrowed line from Bill Cosby: “I’ll match what your friends will give you!”

Though my son left that conversation disappointed, he found that disappointment can be a tough but valuable teacher. Out of Sean’s frustration came the motivation to find a way to earn the money he needed for his car—no matter what.

When he announced his decision to write a book about favorite family lectures, we initially laughed. He was sixteen, and we were sure that writing a term paper and charging readers a quarter might be a more realistic goal. But after explaining his plan and making a good case for my joining him on the project, a dream was launched.

Sean took surveys from hundreds of teens. He became the co-author of his first self-published book, *Secrets of Life Every Teenager Needs to Know*. He helped earn his new car the old-fashioned way—by working for it. Disappointments can launch dreams. For optimists, good things can come out of even the toughest parents.

### **Truth #3: Face the Brutal Reality but Never Lose Faith**

Leaders must be able to authentically drive a rock-solid optimistic vision while being willing to face the brutal facts—the uncomfortable truths of the obstacles they face in today’s competitive

“You must maintain unwavering faith that you can and will prevail in the end, regardless of the difficulties—and at the same time, have the discipline to confront the most brutal facts of your current reality, whatever they might be.”

—Jim Collins

and treacherous global economy. Such free markets ensure both success and failure—winners and losers. Companies that were once successful can lose out to competitors in developing countries who are able to produce similar products at half or even a quarter the price.

Those who are successful in adapting, survive; those who don’t fall by the wayside. In challenging times, companies go under and people lose jobs, but out of that crisis, the seeds of new opportunities emerge. Resources are reinvested. Companies are refocused and people are retooled. Small businesses get launched because people have mortgages and no way to pay them off. We want painless progress, but pain and change often make economies stronger. Someone is always making tough economies work; it might as well be you and your company!

We like to think that we are the only age that has had to deal with constant change. We are not. Spectacular booms have always been accompanied by brutal competition, followed by glaring busts every time something truly new has come on the scene.

“Creative destruction is not just an unfortunate side effect of free-market capitalism; it is the very engine of capitalistic prosperity. Unprofitable methods, firms and industries must be liquidated to release resources for new enterprises. Investment is not enough. There has to be disinvestment as well.”

—Edward Luttwak  
Author of *Turbo Capitalism*

From the canal mania in the 1830s to the dot.com craze of the 1990s, investors invariably got burned for letting their exuberance get ahead of reality. But when the smoke cleared, new innovations were left for new booms to ride! Railroad tracks helped create a national mass market. Telegraph lines facilitated the rise of modern big business. Electricity grids revolutionized manufacturing and extended the working



day. The dot.com busts unleashed the Internet and new digital platforms that serve us today. Destruction is part of the foundation for economic and societal growth.

The struggle to survive produces stress, but stress is the spice of life. It's overcoming those storms and the stress they create that makes the ride worthwhile. After all, stress is created by the demands placed on us—the challenges to make a difference with our time and our skills. The absence of stress is death! Wouldn't you rather have a demanding day? Good leaders and professionals love days with a lot of important things to accomplish. Time flies when you're making meaningful things happen.

## Beware of the Status Quo

So don't dread the difficult days; expect them. In fact, learn to relish the growth and opportunity that such experiences allow. Don't be blindsided by changes; do your part to create your own disruptions.

What executives put on their desks tells a lot about what they feel is important. Telephone industry executive Ian McNeil stares frequently

"The world is too big for us. Too much is going on. Too many crimes, too much violence and excitement. Try as you will, you get behind in the race in spite of yourself. It is an incessant strain to keep pace, and still you lose ground. Science empties its discoveries on you so fast you stagger beneath them in hopeless bewilderment. . . . Everything is high-pressure. Human nature can't endure much more."

—*Atlantic Journal* Editorial,  
June 16, 1833

"Life is about storms. . . . Stress, in and of itself, is not the problem. Stress can be a good thing. If you think about the things that created your character, created your ability to fight, and made a difference, in every case, it would be the storms. It's the things that pushed you the most that helped you the most."

—Jim Loehr

“Prolonged equilibrium dulls the organism’s senses and saps its ability to arouse itself appropriately in the face of danger. Survival favors heightened adrenaline levels, wariness, and experimentation. . . . The first rule of life is the first rule of business: Adapt or die!”

—Richard Pascale

at an unsettling reminder: “Recognize that every ‘out front’ maneuver you make is going to be lonely. If you feel entirely comfortable, then you’re not far enough ahead to do any good. That warm sense of everything going well is usually the body temperature at the center of the herd.”

The status quo is not your friend; in a competitive, down

economy, the absence of change means death. Those who coast with current best practices may enjoy a period of time where it works. But if you don’t reinvent yourself, your competitors will do it for you.

It takes more than vigilant leaders to make change work; it takes vigilant workers who are committed to sustaining a customer-centric company that keeps adapting. Jeff Bezos, the CEO of Amazon.com, talks about a perspective that contributes to the company’s success: “We need to be afraid of our customers, because those are the folks who give us money. I remind people every morning we should wake up afraid and use the terror as a motivator. The customers are the folks that at the end of the day are really in control. . . . Customers have a bigger voice online. If we make a customer unhappy, they can tell thousands of people. Likewise, if you make a customer happy, they can also tell thousands of people. With that kind of a megaphone in the hands of every individual customer, you had better be a customer-centric company.”

With e-commerce, bad days have a way of expanding in a viral fashion. Today, emotion flies at net speed. Reputations and relationships can be damaged in minutes. Yes, life is difficult for organizations as well.

As a result, excellence has to be earned every single day. The reward is going home satisfied from a hard day’s work and the joy of recovery, recreation, and rest. Life is still about playing the bad and the good hands well. So bring on the storms and the stress. But what about life’s good hands?

## Your Wonderful Life Is Also Filled with Happy Accidents

We should never forget that bad days are only half of the cards we're dealt; we also are given more than our share of good days. A perennial Christmas favorite and movie classic—Frank Capra's *It's a Wonderful Life*—reminds us that during the worst of times, we often forget how precious and important life can be. Jimmy Stewart's character George Bailey—facing a bank run and the imminent failure of his savings and loan—decides that he is worth more to his family dead than alive. Clarence, the incompetent but creative angel charged with bringing him from the brink of suicide, decides to take him on a journey through the Bedford Falls that would have existed if he had not lived. When confronted with many of his life's blessings and the difference he made in the lives of others, George Bailey passionately chooses life.

But, you protest, that's a movie! Okay, so maybe your angel isn't as creative, but the same question remains. When you face challenging times, is your glass half full or half empty? Have you ever tried admitting that it's both? Everyone's life—including your own—has more than its fair share of both bad and good accidents. And while the bad ones get the press, the blessings have a way of passing by unnoticed and unappreciated.

Whether you take time to appreciate them or not, your life has plenty of happy accidents. For starters, you were born in a country you didn't choose and to a mother you didn't get to pick. But if you were born to parents in a de-

veloped country, that's a happy accident that positively affected your life in more ways than you can count. Additionally, life has probably given you games you should have lost, but the ball bounced your way. There are those times on the freeway when you didn't switch lanes and missed hitting the car you hadn't seen advancing on the left. There's that missed flight that allowed you to meet that special person or customer. How about that sales call

“Become a possibilitarian. No matter how dark things seem to be or actually are, raise your sights and see possibilities—always see them, for they're always there.”

—Norman Vincent Peale

you handled poorly—and they bought anyway. Call it fate, good luck, karma, or one of God’s blessings; rest assured that life has given you gifts you didn’t deserve. As an optimist, be grateful for them. One of the greatest secrets of happiness is gratitude.

### Truth #4: This Too Shall Pass

Both good and the bad times will come, and both will eventually pass. Even with the best of teams, a given game’s momentum has a way of shifting to the other team. In our competitive, global economy, both the economic booms and the recessions end at some point. Understanding this truth is important in maintaining your sanity, perspective, and focus on what matters most in life.

As Abraham Lincoln struggled with the long and costly Civil War, one of his favorite quotes that fueled both his resolve and his hope was the Middle Eastern truth: “This too shall pass.” My mother used to say the same thing, and she was talking about me—“Someday these teenage years will end!” Perhaps as a self-defense mechanism, we tend to overestimate the impact of bad economic periods and underestimate how fast we will be able to bounce back when the good times return. This helps us get busy dealing with the impact of bad recessions and helps us forget them when prosperity returns.

An economist at business periodical *Fast Company* wrote: “Optimism is over. . . . The layoffs, buyouts, and bankruptcies of the past year are starting to look like the good old days. Business

“You cannot always choose what happens to you, but you can always choose what happens in you! You cannot change the circumstances that life throws at you, but you can choose how you respond to the circumstances.”

—Willie Jolley

sucks to such a degree that unbridled optimism—the kind of wild, harebrained zest to rule the world—is now just a sign that your meds aren’t working.”

When was that written? If you guessed 2001—right after the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the economic downturn that resulted—then you would be

right. Within months after that column was written, America was back on its feet and moved into a sustained period of economic growth that lasted through 2007. The media has a way of exaggerating the worst and discounting the best of times.

Parents have a similar tendency to worry about their children and wonder whether they will ever grow out of the problems they face before they enter adulthood. Because of their enduring love and concern, parents through the ages have always had that sense of apprehension. But thankfully, few societies have had to cope with roving gangs of gun-toting, drug-abusing seniors, because life has a way of socializing and training people to become more productive and more socially appropriate to survive. Over the years, to their dismay and wonder, most of those troubled teens end up acting more and more like the parents they swore they would never become. Yes, this too shall pass!

## **Overall . . . It's a Pretty Good Life**

The ebb and flow of the positive and negative in our lives can't be avoided. The great game of business will continue to produce a new set of winners and losers. The market will go up, and it will go down. Your life will have tragic moments and endearing, precious ones as well.

Success is learning how to handle both well. Coach Phil Jackson, the most winning coach in NBA finals history has challenged players and leaders alike to take the middle path: "I got to watch him [Red Holzman, former coach of the New York Knicks] very closely. He talked philosophy with me, and he talked about the importance of staying not too high, not too low and not letting victories or defeats send you tumbling one way or the other. He believed in what was called the middle path."

Never get too engrossed in setbacks, nor too excited about the latest victory. After all, whether as a company or as an individual, you don't want just one good year. You want a sustainable dynasty that finds a way to get beyond any setbacks to win year after year. Coach Jackson never overcoaches or micromanages his players. He

## 24 The Optimism Advantage

lets them play through the tough runs to gain confidence in their own abilities to bounce back. In short, whether leading others or managing yourself, be a perspective leveler. Be humble about success, and don't let overconfidence in the good times set the stage for complacency. Be confident in the face of setbacks. You've bounced back in the past, and you'll do it again.

An engaging cartoon shows a couple staring at a graph of their 50-year marriage that hangs over their family room fireplace. The caption captures the husband's observation to his longtime wife and companion: "Overall, it's been a pretty good marriage."

If you made a similar graph of your life, my guess is that there would be up times and down times. One of life's main challenges lies in learning how to sustain more positive days and bounce back quicker from the tough ones. Think of the practice in major league baseball to pay a .300 hitter more than a .200 hitter. Work to get the best batting average you can get in the game that counts for you! Your attitude in the face of adversity and happy accidents will make a difference in that batting average. As an optimist, you'll know that while you can never control everything that happens to you, you can certainly control your responses.

"A pessimist is one who makes difficulties of his opportunities and an optimist is one who makes opportunities of his difficulties."

—Harry Truman

Even if you've been on the receiving end of terrible losses, abuse, crimes, or cancer—don't label yourself as a victim. You are a survivor. You control the resilience, resourcefulness, and persistence you demonstrate in

the face of any adversity. You also control your initiative and innovation in turning your happy accidents and unexpected opportunities into satisfying achievements. Adversity need not define you; instead, it can refine you.

# Your Choice: Victim or Resilient Survivor

*“Don’t go around saying the world owes you a living. The world owes you nothing. It was here first.”*

—Mark Twain

**T**here’s no question that life is difficult, but the way you respond to those difficulties will determine whether you’re a victim or a resilient survivor. That continuing choice has little to do with what happens to you and much to do with how you label its impact on your life. Optimists aren’t looking for excuses or searching for people to blame. They’re busy finding ways to bounce back and make the best of any setback. Instead of looking back, they’re looking forward.

Micron Technology and its subsidiaries manufacture and market semiconductor devices worldwide. CEO Steve Appleton has no room for excuses in driving for the results that

“The search for someone to blame is always successful.”

—Robert Half

mean survival for his company: “I don’t believe in being a good loser. It’s a ridiculous concept. Maybe it would be a super world if there were no winners and losers. I don’t think there has been any time in human history where that was true. That’s not the way it is. People in other countries want what we’ve got, and they’re going to go after it. Hey, I’m not going to teach my kids that it’s OK to lose. Somebody is going to want their jobs. Somebody is going to want their standard of living. They need to know life isn’t fair. Wake up and get used to it.”

No matter what life deals you, refuse to label yourself a victim! Depending on what has happened to you, you might find it tempting to label yourself as a victim. But allowing yourself to embrace that label can strip you of the will and the positive attitude you need to overcome the adversities you will continue to encounter. Optimists, by definition, refuse to let what happened to them define or limit their lives.

## Truth #5: Be a Resilient Survivor No Matter What You Face

If you are still alive, you are not a victim; you’re a survivor. The label you claim for yourself has a direct effect on how you think and act. It also has consequences in terms of how others perceive and respond to you. The word *victim* brings with it an image of continued suffering under the weight of a heavy burden from past experiences that cannot be changed. Addressing yourself as a

“The adult child movement, by declaring practically everyone to be a victim of imperfect parenting and therefore eligible for lifelong, self-absorbed irresponsibility, has trivialized real suffering and made psychic invalids of those who once had a bad day.”

—Frank Pittman, MD

victim—and having others do the same—produces feelings of helplessness, despondency, and sometimes anger.

The term *survivor*, however, brings to mind someone who endures, lives through the adversity, persists, and bounces back to make progress anyway. To be repeatedly addressed as a strong and resilient survivor encourages feelings of pride



and personal empowerment. Being a victim is passive; it leaves you feeling powerless, with little faith or hope. Being a survivor is active; it encourages you to regain control of your life and work together with others to rebuild your future. Being a victim creates pity; being a resilient survivor invites respect.

So don't let people call you a victim. Too many seem to treat victimhood not as a temporary problem to be overcome but rather as an identity to be nurtured. Define yourself instead as a resilient survivor and live that definition every day. The best way to overcome adversity is to succeed in spite of it. Victim

thinking is a seductive trap that leaves you chained to events that can't be changed.

The good news, however, is that you have the key to unlock your own chains, and you start with claiming a new label: "I'm a resilient survivor who is ready to get on with my life!" If you want to remain a victim, that is your choice. But if you are ready to change, there are many optimists out there ready to help you do so. We are meant to be masters of our own future, not victims of anyone else's actions or abuse. But to do that, you have to transform your thinking and your habits.

"When I grew up, I had physical problems, but my mind worked well. My mother would never let me feel sorry for myself. She just wouldn't allow that. You've got to realize that a situation is only a situation, and you can't lose perspective. You can't let outside circumstances control you. I had an advantage, because I grew up with a handicap. So I think I knew that outside circumstances are just circumstances. I realized that I always had to continue with what I still had left—which was life."

—Tom Denner

## **Truth #6: Don't Just Watch Negative News; Get Busy Making Your Own**

Hours spent daily watching your television news will do more to add to your depression than to alleviate your feelings of helplessness. So find your own sources to keep you informed about what you need to know,

but watch your doses! According to Nielsen Media Research, if you're like other Americans, a television is on somewhere in your house for more than eight hours a day. After all, there are advantages to this form of entertainment. It's the cheapest way to pretend to have people in your home without feeding them. And while you may not intently be paying attention to what's on your television, it still has an effect—and the result often supports your victim thinking.

A local news show producer, frustrated with complaints about how negative media news had become, did a little truth telling of his own: "We have very good data on what the average American wants to watch. Our news has to have 90 percent problems, crimes and catastrophes. If we add 10 percent humor, human interest and good personalities, people will watch our news. That's the nature of the beast. If you lead with a positive story, they'll click their way to another station. I'm embarrassed to even say this, but for every day of the year, we have footage of past deaths and disasters. If there is no current crisis, we can always have anniversaries of old ones!"

Princess Diana will conveniently die every year on cue. The news media is prepared to bring any disaster, political scandal, or graphic crime to your television within minutes. If terrorists and criminals aren't bad enough, we're constantly made aware of the dangerous germs that confront us from every public place and from the air we share on planes. With some welcome exceptions, producers still fill hours and editors fill pages with some of the worst news our world has to offer. The frantic and energizing challenge of delivering "bad" news 24/7 often comes at the expense of our

"All too often, minority kids never hear about anyone other than athletes. They don't know the living you can make with your mind. When I hear the same thing in black schools as white, kids talking about becoming doctors and lawyers, I know the ghetto will disappear."

—Rosey Grier

optimism and perceived opportunities. You are likely to find that once you cut your intake of negative news, you will experience a change in attitude. If you are going to continue to watch, actively seek out more stories and programs that uplift you and give you hope in what you can do to better your life.

## Simpler Times Made for a Powerful People

In ages past, people were far more focused on local news. News of national catastrophes would take days to be covered; international news would take even longer. Since the papers still had to be filled, reporters would look for what they could find. They'd show pictures of Martha's car in a ditch. They'd cover the local churchwomen's group taking casseroles to Martha as she recovered from her injuries. They'd show a community coming together to rebuild a fire-damaged barn.

We were a more powerful people during that time because we could handle the problems we faced. Those local stories and problems still take

"If you don't like the news, go out and make some of your own."

—Wes Scoop Nisker

place today, but they're seldom covered or they're buried in the back pages of the newspaper. They don't make the headlines or the lead story on the evening news. For far too many years, too many people have settled for being powerless observers. We watch the world around us, transfixed by scandals, wars, and disasters that are beyond our ability to fix, instead of getting involved locally to make a difference where we are. Welcome to learned helplessness and the seeds of victim thinking.

Instead of just following world events, you must begin to invest some of your time in making things happen where you are planted. Don't just read or watch the news; become the news by making a difference, and experience how quickly you will feel like a resilient survivor.

## Optimists Still Make a Difference Today

Although resilient survivors are everywhere, they are seldom covered in the news. The United States has always been known for its can-do optimism, and you can still find plenty of examples of that optimism in action today. You can adopt this attitude yourself; find ways to perceive the hardships you face as temporary setbacks rather than as final verdicts.

“There are many causes to victimization, some direct and some indirect. But these must be seen as hurdles and not excuses! . . . These are simply hurdles to jump, and they can be jumped. . . . A lack of basic education severely limits your life options. . . . No one can stop you from getting educated other than yourself.”

—Bill Cosby

Remember, it’s what you think and do when things go wrong that determines whether you give up and play victim or get busy as a resilient survivor in overcoming whatever life throws your way. Survivors say to themselves: “I’m going to figure out how to beat this—one way or another!” Victims, on the other hand, lament, “I’ll never be able to succeed, so why even bother to try?”

## Stop Blaming and Start Helping

Optimists don’t waste a lot of time being preoccupied with life’s alleged unfairness. Instead, they get busy making things better. You don’t have to look too far back in history to find examples of this uniquely American optimism in action. When Hurricane Katrina leveled the Gulf Coast, optimists found a way to create a new beginning one day at a time. Although half of her house was left uninhabitable after a tree crashed through their roof in Covington, Louisiana, Peggy Miranda and her family were still more focused on doing what they could to help others. Peggy confided, “It was healing for us to serve. This is a great opportunity to love on people who you would never love on. . . . It’s like sending soldiers back to war. Our men would go out to serve. They’d come back fatigued, beat up and scratched. They rest for a day, eat and then go back.”

Charlene Hoover yelled out her car window to a family sitting on the curb outside the Astrodome, “Are ya’ll from New Orleans?” When Hasheen Cook replied affirmatively, Charlene said, “Well, we’re looking for a family to adopt. Do ya’ll need a place to stay?” Members of the Cook family wept with joy. Charlene’s husband, Chuck, said, “We had to do this. We couldn’t just sit and watch on TV and not do anything.”

Michael Bennett—a 43-year-old business owner from Ventura County—joined others making a difference in Baton Rouge. With tears, he said, “Until you’ve helped someone through a disaster like this, you haven’t lived. There’s nothing like helping people.”

When Michael’s neighbors heard he was going to help, they piled food and clothes in his truck. Biloxi *Sun Herald* editor Stan Tiner and his family said prayers together and then did what they could to make a difference. “My plight may be bad, but so many others have it worse. So even if some have lost all of their worldly possessions, they have much for which to give thanks. The statement that has become our mantra is ‘I’m still standing.’”

They were just still standing! While some people spent their time and energy complaining about how poorly the government responded to Katrina, these heroes were living examples of resilient survivors who bounced back to help themselves and others in the Gulf Coast reclaim their lives. They certainly may be far poorer on their balance sheet, but they’re all much richer in spirit. Don’t just applaud them; find a way to join this merry band by making a difference where you can.

“The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.”

—Martin Luther King Jr.

## The 9/11 Terrorist Attacks Unleashed the Resilient Spirit of a Country

Sometimes disasters come from nature; sometimes they’re the result of others’ actions. The 9/11 attacks by Islamic terrorists cost thousands of lives and simultaneously assailed the very spirit of those who survived but had to deal with the impact of these violent acts. There is much to learn from average

“The greatest discovery of my generation is that human beings, by changing the inner attitudes of their minds, can change the outer aspects of their lives.”

—William James

citizens who refused to play the victim and instead reaffirmed their own resilience and inner spirit by rebounding with resolve and determination to keep America strong.

In November 2001, *Business 2.0* and *Fortune* writer Jerry Useem observed: "If this is the first war of the 21st century, then it was also the first war that was visited on the workplace. Home of the cubicle, the busted toner cartridge, and other 'Dilbert' plot conventions, the American office has long been trivialized as a sanctuary of the petty and banal. On September 11th, however it suddenly became anything but. Words and glances passed between colleagues took on life-or-death consequence. Co-workers clasped hands and decided to flee or, in some cases, perish together. . . . Just as the rituals of democracy take on renewed meaning when we're under attack, so too do the rituals of capitalism, however mundane. Now, our work is not only important, but it is now the source of American muscle."

Wall Street is built on hope, and accordingly, the Dow Jones plummeted after the 9/11 attacks. Fear is the coin of the realm for terrorists; they wanted Americans to come to their knees, to become a nation of victims cowering in their homes. After all, when citizens stop the flow of money, they stop the economy. Americans therefore had a choice: to give up or bounce back. Enough Americans made the latter choice, with the support of men and women around the world. The economy rallied. Corporate leaders and workers behaved like warriors. They didn't like what had happened to their country and proclaimed: "We're not going to let anyone pull us under; our economy must thrive, and we'll make sure it does!"

American optimism isn't based on denial or wishful thinking.

"Optimism is a duty. The future is open. It is not predetermined. No one can predict it, except by chance. We all contribute to determining it by what we do. We are all equally responsible for its success."

—Karl Popper

It stands on a rock-solid history of overcoming obstacles, setbacks, and wars to sustain the American Dream. Americans are practical realists. They want to know the bad news, so they can get busy finding out how to handle it. Hurricane Katrina and the 9/11 terrorist attacks were but

two tragic chapters in America's journey. Each event allowed a new generation of Americans to earn the freedoms and opportunities that we so treasure. Americans endured, persisted, and once again showed the world what we're made of. Claim that history as your own history. Be a resilient survivor wherever you are!

## Truth #7: Be Patient Active and Risk Thriving in Pursuit of Health

As a member of the advisory board for Cancer Support Community Valley/Ventura, I've seen this organization in action since its inception nearly two decades ago. With sites around the country, Cancer Support Community is dedicated to providing emotional support, education, and hope to people with cancer and their loved ones, free of charge. Through participation in its professionally led support groups, educational workshops, social activities, and stress-reduction classes, cancer patients learn vital skills that enable them to regain control, reduce isolation, and restore hope, regardless of the stage of their cancer. Working in conjunction with professional medical teams, past cancer survivors, and volunteers, patients can help transform this dreaded diagnosis by becoming *patient active* and doing everything they can to fight the disease. Optimistic patients are realists. They don't disregard the mortality statistics; they just do what they can to make their survival more likely. If not, they find ways to affect their quality of life in the days that they have.

With our strong dependence on medical technology, drugs, and treatment protocols, it is all too easy to become a passive patient who relies on

"This . . . is about living, fighting to recover, and, if possible, recovering. It's about participating in the fight for recovery—being a patient active instead of a passive, hopeless, helpless victim of the illness. It's about hope . . . always hope. In essence it is about the conversion from victim to victor."

—Harold Benjamin, PhD

others to fix the problem. But no matter what the disease or condition, it's important to be patient active in support of your medical treatment plan. The patients with the greatest control over their well-being are the ones who seek out doctors who provide the facts about the medical challenges they face—and let those suffering know what they can do to make a difference in their treatment. Instead of withdrawing, blaming others, or denying the problem, they get busy by becoming part of the solution. They work with their medical team, family, friends, faith community, and support networks to do what they can to become resilient survivors.

California's Kaiser Permanente is another health care organization committed to more than simply treating disease. They've made a commitment to their member community that has become a call to action for everyone in the organization: "We stand for total health!" Whereas most health care providers in our present system are incentivized by patients being sick and needing care, Kaiser Permanente's health care model is built on investing in its members' health. Kaiser VP of Marketing Debbie Cantu says with passion: "All our messages to members are promoting thriving, not just surviving. We are committed to being proactive health advocates on behalf of our members. We don't want them to have to work the system to get care. We want the system to work for them by promoting healthy habits that give them the quality of life they desire. People today don't want health care; they want health!"

And Kaiser is giving people the tools to become patient active by challenging them: "Be Your Own Cause!" While other health care agencies are trying to find the funds to transfer from paper to digital records, 50 percent of Kaiser Permanente's eligible members have already signed on at <http://www.kp.org> for their personalized health care record titled "My Health Manager!" Its members are learning what it is like to be in control of their own health records. Instead of waiting for government to act, Kaiser Permanente is inventing the future and letting its members experience the benefits now.

Whether you are working with Cancer Support Community, Kaiser Permanente, or like-minded organizations—the message is to



take control of your health. No matter where you are in life, or what your health condition or challenge might be, as an optimist, you want to be as self-reliant and healthy as you can be. Be patient active; you just may live long and thrive as long as you live!

## Truth #8: No Dream Will Work Unless You Do

Don't kid yourself. Even in the worst of economic times, you'll never run out of opportunities. The world economy thrives on risk and opportunity. The only relevant questions are whether you can endure the setbacks that come your way and whether you can take advantage of the available opportunities. All it takes for the American Dream to work its magic is for you to claim it and translate it into focused action.

Become an entrepreneur. Take your gifts and find a better way to do something people need. Do it cheaper. Do it faster. When you add value and stay in the game, you'll find a way to succeed. Victims have a way of proving how pointless it is to dream by citing the staggering un-

employment numbers and how many times their resumes have been rejected. Resilient survivors are out there finding employers who need what they have to offer, or they're creating their own small companies. They stay in the game until they score!

There will always be those who are out of work, are between jobs, or could, for a period of time, be classified as poor. There is a chronic needy population. But the question worth asking is how many of those the government reports as poor actually remain poor over time? The University of Michigan has reported on research that followed large samples of impoverished Americans for decades to assess their progress. Over several decades, results showed that only 1 of 20 poor Americans remained this way. Thirteen of 20 became

"People who are achievement oriented feel that they must be in control of their lives. . . . They do not expect to advance by demanding more from 'society,' but by demanding more of themselves."

—Harold B. Jones, *Personal Character and National Destiny*

middle class; 6 become rich as defined by rising to the top 20 percent of American wage earners. Of course, you can argue over whether that's rich, but it certainly isn't poor.

Although there is a small underprivileged population that may not improve, in general, all boats continue to rise—if you're willing to row! There will always be recessions to contend with, and they are hardest on those who have lost jobs and don't have the savings to cushion the tough times. While that is undoubtedly difficult for those experiencing it, your best bet is not victim thinking; it's constructive action. Optimism is infectious. If you don't look out, you may catch it! Dwell on your hopes and your confidence, not your doubts and your fears. Even in the face of new challenges,

“The ladder of success is best climbed by stepping on the rungs of opportunity.”

—Ayn Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*

unseen disasters, and economic trials, you must keep thinking, dreaming, and inventing your future, and you just may become a resilient survivor.

## Truth #9: Unleash the Power of Optimistic Stories and Positive Gossip

If you are a leader, it doesn't help to be alone in your optimism. Your challenge is to be contagious. At times, that means becoming a cheerleader, champion, communicator, challenger, change agent, and comic. But in tough times, it all comes down to keeping hope alive. You must both tell the truth about the obstacles your team faces and inspire them to take advantage of the opportunities that lie ahead. One of the best ways to do that is to share heroic stories from the past and present.

Stories turn experiences into narratives, people into heroes, and earned successes into renewed optimism. All of a sudden, optimism is no longer an abstract attitude; it's a message embodied in a team or hero. When people can see optimism in action, it is far more contagious.

The most satisfying stories come out of experience forged through the heat of real-world struggles. The dictionary defines *hero* as a person “distinguished by the performance of extraordinary brave or noble deeds.” Since optimism is earned through a track record of overcoming obstacles, find stories about your past heroes and how their optimistic resilience helped the organization turn tough times into a launching pad for growth.

“Whether you are talking about an organization or a country, stories help us all think about who we are, where we come from, what obstacles we have and must still overcome, and where we are headed. In the right hands such stories can either leave people feeling hopeless and helpless or inspired into purposeful action.”

—Edward O. Welles

To reinforce the 3M culture of innovation with new technical associates, leaders continue to tell “The Post-It Story” to prove that one committed and innovative employee can make a profound difference for the company. But you can’t just dwell on the *good old days*; your job is to create the *new good old days*.

So instead of just honoring past heroes, share current stories of optimism in action. After all, the biggest difference between being optimistic and generating optimism is whose stories you get excited about sharing. Capture hope and excellence where you find them, fan the sparks of their enthusiasm by honoring them, and reflect their passion by positively gossiping about their exploits to others who do not yet believe that things can and will be better! The best stories describe both the struggles involved in overcoming obstacles and the hard-fought moments of victory that resulted.

Even in tough economic times, Southwest Airlines seems to continue to fly right. Part of what makes the airline successful is its ability to find, acknowledge, and celebrate the stories of how its people keep the airline soaring. Colleen Barrett, Southwest’s president emeritus, treasures her past role as Southwest’s resident den mother, the keeper of the flame of excellence. She urged workers to fill out LUV reports every time they had an upbeat story to share. The stories generated were honored and shared. Southwest still celebrates their LUV reports by creating celebrations, tributes, and

incentives to keep the unique Southwest persona alive. Who is the den mother in your organization?

To surface stories worth sharing, take the time to ask questions that let people share their successes: What has been working for you? What are you doing differently that's worth bragging about? You can't push or pull people into optimism, but you can catch their optimism in action and brag about it.

"Our role as leaders is not to catch people doing things wrong but to create an environment in which people can become heroes."

—Newt Hardie

See your organization as a diamond. By sharing positive stories, you can show its beauty, one facet at a time. Get busy unleashing the power of the story in your organization! Your people deserve to know

the rest of the story waiting to be told about your organization. Sharing such stories keeps hope alive in the hearts and minds of your people. Now, do you have any positive gossip to share? Just imagine! Someday, future generations may very well be sharing your stories!

## Don't Just Survive . . . Thrive

How does the material in this chapter relate to you? Whether as an individual or as a leader, your attitude and the labels you use to define yourself have consequences. Make the choice today to avoid victim thinking and, instead, seize the day as a contagious, resilient survivor. As long as you are alive, you always have options. Survivors make the best of their available options, while victims whine about how few they have. However, there is never nothing you can do. The only relevant questions are whether a given action will work and whether additional different actions will be required. The choice of whether to be a victim or a resilient survivor is yours. This book is dedicated to helping you make that choice every day until it becomes a self-fulfilling habit. When you are good at doing so, you won't just survive; you will thrive and take others with you!

# The Optimistic Power of Purpose

*“It is one of the most beautiful compensations of this life that no one can sincerely try to help another without helping themselves.”*

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

**W**e now can appreciate that life is difficult—both on and off the job—and that optimists can and do choose to be resilient survivors, not victims. But life is more than a series of disconnected challenges and opportunities. It can provide significant meaning and is best experienced as a journey with a purpose in mind.

A farmer once confided to me, “The problem with our children today is that they are not needed. On the farm every kid was needed, and they learned to deal with life and overcome every obstacle life dealt.” Children need to know they are needed. We all need to know we make a difference; we need the power that a sense of purpose can provide.

“Don’t let yourself wake up in three years and say, ‘I’m three years older, and I just happened to get here.’ Clarify your vision, so that you can grow into it.”

—Terri Lonier

Psychologist and author of *Learned Optimism* Martin Seligman added his appreciation for the power that purpose can provide: “Optimism, . . . by itself, cannot provide meaning. Optimism is a tool to help the individual achieve the goals he has

set for himself. It is in the choice of the goals themselves that meaning—or emptiness—resides. When learned optimism is coupled with a renewed commitment to the commons, our epidemic of depression and meaninglessness may end.” In other words, a positive attitude is a good thing, but it isn’t the only thing. Only when it is combined with meaningful goals and supporting actions does optimism really help us get to where we need to be!

## Purpose and Optimism Come from a Heart of Service

A powerful purpose can have an impact on all aspects of your life. Nobel Prize-winning medical missionary to Africa Albert Schweitzer knew the power of purpose when he said, “If you truly desire happiness, seek and learn how to serve.” Whether you’re offering a smile with an encouraging word, taking the time to complete a random act of kindness, or serving a customer on the job—you transform your own optimistic attitude and feelings

“Everyone has his own specific vocation or mission in life; everyone must carry out a concrete assignment that demands fulfillment. Therein he cannot be replaced, nor can his life be repeated, thus, everyone’s task is unique as his specific opportunity.”

—Viktor Frankl

when you make a difference for others.

Viktor Frankl was a Jewish psychoanalyst and Holocaust survivor who used his analytical skills to understand why some had not lost hope in such a glaringly hopeless situation. In his best-selling book, *Man’s Search for Meaning*, Frankl wrote: “We who lived in

concentration camps can remember the men who walked through the huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread. They may have

been few in number, but they offer sufficient proof that everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way. And there were always choices to make. Every day, every hour, offered the opportunity to make a decision, a decision which determined whether you would or would not submit to those powers which threatened to rob you of your very self, your inner freedom; which determined whether or not you would become the plaything of circumstance, renouncing freedom and dignity to become molded into the form of the typical inmate. Fundamentally, therefore, a man can, even under such circumstances, decide what shall become of him—mentally and spiritually. He may retain his human dignity even in a concentration camp.”

“Those who have a why to live, can bear with almost any how.”

—Viktor Frankl

Frankl's words convey a compelling message: that there is a power of purpose that comes in serving others. More people today have the means to live, but few seem to have found their meaning to live. The struggle to find your sense of purpose will pay off in an optimistic attitude, personal satisfaction, and, often, results that make a difference.

## **Truth #10: Live a Mission That Taps Your Purpose, and Work Ceases to Be Work**

Having a compelling purpose can directly affect your work and your organization. After all, you don't just want a job with a good salary and benefits. You want to love what you do, and you want to do your part in making a difference for an organization with a meaningful mission. Ostensibly, serving customers—or the public at large—is what successful organizations are all about. Consistently finding ways to serve others has an added benefit—it makes it easier and more fulfilling for you to keep coming to work every day.

“I could detect a distinct correlation between this notion of vision and performance. . . . The good ones had a vision. As for the bad ones, it was hard to tell why the people had come to work that morning.”

—Donald Povejsil

Most companies take time to craft a vision and mission, but placing those statements on a wall or in an annual report does little to enliven anyone’s sense of purpose. The biggest difference between a vision and a hallucination is the number of people who can see it—and live it! For a mission on the job

to make a difference, it must exist and be apparent in your heart, mind, and daily actions. And it helps especially when that mission meaningfully resonates with your own deeper purpose. Successful organizations have torchbearers willing to lead and associates committed to using their skills and experience to deliver on the dream.

Seth Godin describes the impact of leaders with a strong sense of purpose: “Torchbearers . . . are willing to take responsibility for carrying the flame. The biggest chasm in our society has become the gap between people who embrace the torchbearer’s responsibility to customers, investors, and companies and those who are just there for the job.”

Torchbearers don’t accept excuses. They attract others because they care more about moving forward than they do about which route they take. They are pursuing the joy of meaningful achievement driven by an equally strong devotion to duty. These leaders don’t give up until they’re done. When was the last time you picked up a torch at work that brought you responsibility and satisfaction? Do you see any torches worth picking up on or off the job? Do you see any leaders you are eager to follow?

Instead of settling for people who just want a job, torchbearers want people who share their passion and purpose. Instead of assigning people, there is power in letting teams form around a shared commitment to the project.

“Vision without action is only a dream. Action without vision is just passing the time. Vision with action can change the world.”

—Joel Barker

Maria Dotson, Vice President of Global Clinical Operations at Quintiles Transnational Corporation, has spent much of her career working to develop project management best practices. She does



less assigning and more recruiting for the best people to serve: “When a new project comes in the door, I broadcast it to the organization: ‘Who wants to come forward and why?’ When people apply, I want to know if there’s something special motivating them. If it’s a cancer drug, did their grandmother die of cancer? Have they always been eager to work with this particular client?”

“Especially in troubled times, leaders must be like emotional and intellectual anchors. You must steady the organization and have a passionate belief that what you are doing is important. I never realized how critical that was in times of turbulence. Leadership is about what you do when the going gets tough.”

—C. K. Prahalad

In the same way, today’s leaders are riding herd over a never-ending stream of pickup games. They also know the frightening truth: Without people who want to do the job and have the right complementary skills to accomplish it, the project will not be done with the urgency and the quality customers require in today’s competitive world economy. Once you have the right people, then, like any good pickup game, make sure the teams have a way to know the score. Then you let them play. A motivated strategic focus, an attitude of fearlessness, a passionate sense of purpose, and a get-it-done-in-whatever-way-that-counts flexibility are what leaders value most in today’s pickup players.

Unfortunately, various surveys suggest that as many as a quarter of Americans don’t find meaning in what they do on a daily basis. The primary reason they remain in their job is that they can’t afford to quit. They’re locked into good benefits and a health care plan that they can’t afford to lose. This is a bad deal for the organization, and it’s bad for those clinging to their jobs.

## **Truth #11: Risk Becoming the Architect of Your Own Future**

Changing this may seem easier said than done; in difficult economic times, people may take a little longer. But in the long run, life is too short to stay in a job that you don’t like. So if this describes

you—don't settle! You deserve more. Risk becoming the architect of your own future. Even as you continue toiling in your current position, begin looking for ways to find a more meaningful job—one that you can actually enjoy. You may not be able to find your dream occupation right away, but you can find significance and satisfaction by opening new chapters in your life that will get you a lot closer to it. Expand your internal network, and share your career goals. You may just find a pickup game in your current organization that is much more fulfilling.

Writing on intrinsic motivation, Ken Thomas observes: "Self-management is simply the set of steps you go through to apply your intelligence to accomplishing a purpose, . . . but those steps can only be driven by a purpose that is meaningful to you."

So if someone asked you what gives your life meaning, how would you respond? Pretend that you're on an elevator, and you have just one minute to tell another person the truth about your purpose and mission. Can you articulate it? Or are you—like so many others—struggling with the implications of not having an answer?

"Worse than being blind is to see and have no vision."

—Helen Keller

After all, you may be saying, "I'm no Martin Luther King Jr.—no Gandhi or Mother Teresa!" But think

about it; these individuals didn't immediately begin their lives as the giants they eventually became. Mother Teresa didn't come onto the world stage as a saint. She started humbly by finding one small corner of a broken world and holding the hand of a person in need. They simply did what they felt they were meant to do where they were. Their missions found them as they lived out their lives one choice at a time.

Is there one thing that you feel you are meant or called to do? While this is possible, it's more likely that your life will have many chapters—all of which will be fulfilling in their own way. Be a humble explorer, repeatedly becoming a beginner in new arenas as you keep shaping your life one day at a time. Finding your purpose is too important a goal to come easily, and it's worth every second of the struggle! But don't let finding your grand purpose trap you into purpose paralysis. After all, the very idea of finding one underlying

motive on which your entire life value will be based can be intimidating! Take the pressure off by not expecting your stated purpose to be profound or fully developed. Maybe you could start with a general commitment to live life in a meaningful way and to trust that meaning and purpose will most likely shift through the different stages of your life.

You won't find your purpose sitting still; it's in living your life with gusto that your purpose finds you. I respected my father so much that I assumed that if accounting was good enough for him, it was good enough for me. Unfortunately, I soon found that even though the work came easily in my college classes, I didn't enjoy it.

Soon it was psychology that captured my attention and stirred my interest. Through years of graduate school, research, and internships, I looked toward a time when I could start my own practice. I partnered with another psychologist right out of school. It was the right time; I was already used to poverty and had nothing to lose.

Although my work was satisfying, I did not find my current calling until I started speaking to community groups to attract clients. My practice was growing, as was my appreciation of the joy of touching audiences with inspiring content they could use on and off the job.

“Discovering purpose is like uncovering patterns. If you understand the first chapters of your life, you're in a better position to write the next chapters. We all need to be part of a bigger story.”

—Gregory A. Plotnikoff, MD

After speaking on assertion training to a chamber of commerce group, a businessman asked me to speak to his leadership team. I replied, half joking, “I don't do that. I'm a psychologist. People come to me.” He laughed and said the magic words, “We pay speakers.”

Money has a way of grabbing your attention when you're poor. I jumped at the opportunity, only to find that I had found my calling. Soon I was speaking more and enjoying doing therapy less. I found a meaningful career that continues to drive my mission and sustains my motivation to this day. My purpose batteries get recharged every time I have the opportunity to speak.

## Identifying and Using Your Purpose in Support of a Meaningful Mission

Are you living in support of a mission worthy of your commitment? Do you have a sense of calling that recharges your purpose batteries? There are many things to look for:

- When you're engaged in actions that are aligned with your purpose, you'll feel most alive.
- It will feel life-giving and self-fulfilling.
- Actions will seem to flow naturally from your commitment.
- You'll find yourself looking for opportunities to exercise that purpose and deepen your understanding of what sustains it.

"Vocation is the place where your deep gladness meets the world's deep need."

—Frederick Buechner

In many ways, instead of making a rational or even emotional commitment, the right purpose will tend to grab ahold of you!

Okay, are you still struggling with this question? In order to facilitate your journey of discovery, try putting aside the professional and personal masks that we often use to define us. Strip away the letters after your name, your professional and group labels—and even your current position. Instead, let the following criteria guide your discovery:

- What name would you give to the purpose that describes your actions when work doesn't seem like work?
- What excites you about getting up in the morning? What are you looking forward to?
- What part of your organization's mission makes you proud enough to brag about it to others?
- Finish this statement: "I love my job and my life when I get to \_\_\_\_\_."
- If I had all the money and time in the world, how would I use my talents to serve others?

What stands out in these answers as the purpose that currently drives you? It's time to claim that purpose you've worked to discover and to use it to more consistently energize your daily work and life. Let it change and deepen as your awareness affects your passion for what you do and how you serve. Don't worry about impressing others. You want your purpose—the one that works for you at this point in your life!

“You can only become truly accomplished at something you love. Don't make money your goal. Instead, pursue the things you love doing, and then do them so well that people can't take their eyes off you.”

—Maya Angelou

The next question to ask yourself is: Does your purpose fit what you are now doing with your life? Since your calendar is your living creed—do its entries and appointments demonstrate that you are living your purpose on and off the job? After all, what you put in your calendar tends to get done. Start making purposeful commitments that will guide your actions this week.

Consider whether your purpose aligns with your organization's mission and strategic vision. Can you make it fit by adjusting your attitude or your role? Optimism and cynicism are both contagious; your employer deserves your commitment and passion for the work you do! If you can't find alignment and be optimistic about making a difference, start investing time in finding a position that allows you to do just that.

Whether on or off the job, nothing is more motivating than working with others in support of a meaningful mission. Embracing a strong personal calling that enlivens that purpose will allow you to say no to things that aren't worth doing—and to accomplish results you can be proud of.

“Taking makes me feel like I'm dying. Giving makes me feel like I'm living.”

—Morrie Schwartz

## Significant Life Events Shape Our Sense of Purpose

Some tragedies are still emblazoned in our minds. Years later, we can recall where we were when we heard the news about the

assassination of President John F. Kennedy, the *Challenger* explosion, and the September 11th terrorist attacks. The Columbine tragedy of April 20, 1999, was one such event. Today, many of the staff working at Columbine High School in 1999 when the shootings occurred have left, but some teachers remain. Five who were students at that time have been drawn back to the school as teachers.

Alise Steiner was a sophomore about to take a math test when violence erupted and the fire alarms went off. She remembers the continued rough times with a succession of suicides in her junior year. But today, she teaches math and coaches girls' lacrosse and cross-country at Columbine High School. "It's like all the roads aligned," Alise said, "and I ended up back at Columbine." Even after being offered a teaching job at a private Christian school, her attachment to Columbine overcame the temptation to move. "I was thinking hard—I was so torn," she said. "But I could not leave. I feel this is where I'm at, and it's meant to be."

Often, our purpose finds us and shapes our mission and our way of making a difference. By helping others cope, we help ourselves. When there was a bomb scare in 2008, one teacher who had gone through the shootings did not want to go to school. A fellow teacher asked her, "Do you want a substitute teacher to comfort your kids on this day?" She went to be with her students. She knew that sharing an optimistic attitude in tough times can be contagious and comforting.

## Faith Is a Powerful Source of Purpose and Meaning

Authentic faith-driven missions are a strong source of purpose. I once heard a story wherein a World War II correspondent encountered a nun tending to some horribly wounded and diseased prisoners of war. He said to the nurse, "I wouldn't do that for a million dollars." The nun turned to him and replied, "Neither would I." Purpose gives meaning to even the most difficult tasks.

Faith in what you hold sacred can play a critical role in integrating your life's story around a bigger purpose and plan. It can shape both your sense of calling and your ultimate optimistic

view of the future. Believing that God calls you to love your neighbor easily translates into a fulfilling mission of service. Although Freud's early focus on the neurotic influence of religion had an impact on the early thinking of mental health scholars, history shows that religious organizations were often the first to provide compassionate care to vulnerable people. In fact, the first hospitals were church-sponsored and priest-managed. Faith made a difference for believers and those they served.

But only recently has research shown that religious involvement has a powerful and beneficial effect in encouraging hope and meaning. Studies find that believers are more optimistic than non-believers and that they regain happiness more quickly after experiencing a crisis.

The power of a community has always been important. What drew early believers to Christianity in the first century was what Keith Miller called the "scent of love." It was the way the community of believers served and lived that pulled people to this little group.

Believing in a loving God where serving others serves God makes for a strong centering purpose. In fact, studies of centenarians, those over 100 years of age who are living healthy and happy lives, are often quick to include spirituality as one key source for their fountain of youth. Although no particular faith was isolated, having a strong belief system is a big factor in maintaining personal vitality.

So nurture your beliefs and let them show in your actions and attitude. Instead of making it an argument over religious doctrine, focus on developing a personal love affair with whatever faith drives you and your passionate calling to serve others. As the legendary

"I noticed when you ask the most highly functioning seniors how they are, they always say, 'I feel good . . . thanks to God.' Yet they may be blind and deaf and their bones hurt. . . . The fact that God is in control of their lives relieves any economic, spiritual, or well-being anxiety they might otherwise have. They go through life with the peaceful certitude that someone is looking out for them."

—Dan Buettner

UCLA basketball coach John Wooden said in his autobiography, “If I am ever on trial for my faith, I hope there is enough evidence to convict me.” Having a strong purpose leaves evidence. Does your purpose show in your actions on and off the job? When it does, one of the by-products is optimism.

## Secular Service Also Provides Meaning for Many

Despite the importance that many place on faith, this is not to say that without it, you cannot find a sense of purpose in your life. There are too many instances of purpose-driven nonbelievers to think otherwise.

For example, legendary playwright George Bernard Shaw was clearly passionate—and decidedly secular—in his approach to defining his own purpose: “This is the true joy in life: The being used for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one. . . . Instead of a feverish, selfish little clod of ailments and grievances, complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy. I am of the opinion that my life belongs to the whole community, and as long as I live, it is my privilege to do for it what I can. I want to be thoroughly used up when I die, for the harder I work, the more I live. I rejoice in life for its own sake. Life is no brief candle to me—it’s sort of a splendid torch which I’ve got a hold of for the moment and I want to make it burn as brightly as possible before handing it on to future generations.”

“Be led by your dreams, not  
just pushed by your problems.”

—Roy Williams

Now that is a compelling and passionate purpose worthy of respect. If it resonates with you, let it help you refine your

purpose. Shaw’s desire to leave a legacy and to hand off his purpose to future generations is shared by many. For you, this might translate into mentoring or coaching others on the job. Off the job, it might give you reason as a parent or grandparent to make an impact on the younger members of your family. If you don’t have children of your own, you may be inclined to volunteer with scouting, youth groups, local schools, or Big Brothers/Big Sisters. Finding your purpose leaves evidence for others to see.



Just remember, your purpose will find you if you risk living a life that searches for meaningful ways to serve with the gifts you possess.

## A Sense of Purpose Promotes a Hardy Lifestyle and Meaning

If you want added motivation, a powerful purpose may also help you claim a long, healthy life. American psychologist Salvatore Maddi, co-author of *Resilience at Work: How to Succeed No Matter What Life*

“Hardy executives are self-confident and have a sense of purpose. They have the knack of making whatever they do feel important.”

—Salvatore Maddi, PhD

*Throws at You*, has extensively studied what makes executives hardy in the face of work-related stress. He found that the healthiest executives shared three characteristics: a feeling of commitment, a sense of control in their lives, and an acceptance of life’s stressful moments as challenges rather than threats. This research confirms that having a sense of commitment to a purpose doesn’t merely give you meaning; it may well make you more resistant to the impact of stressful living. If you are a hardy professional, another word would capture those same qualities—you are an optimist!

So, whether it’s sacred or secular, trade your preoccupation with your own daily problems for a centering journey to find your own purpose—your way to use your gifts to make a difference! And take inspiration from the words of Mother Teresa: “Remember this: I can do something you can’t do, and you can do something I can’t do. But we both have to do it.”

When you have faith that your future will make a difference, you’ll undoubtedly see the power in your present. Do something today to find and live your purpose—and you’ll find the optimism, joy and satisfaction that come along for the ride.

“The best way to cheer yourself is to try to cheer somebody else up.”

—Mark Twain

# Optimists Update Their Gifts into Recyclable Assets

*“Today technology can replace whole new industries, so you have to stay flexible. To survive today, you have to be able to walk on quicksand and dance with electrons.”*

—Frank Ogden

**A**re you ready to look with fresh eyes at your opportunity landscape? You’ve already worked at getting a better handle on your purpose. In this chapter, you’ll look for a connection between your gifts and current trends that will intersect with that purpose in a meaningful way. You want to put your gifts to work in a way that makes a difference and a living!

In a constantly changing world, it’s a lot easier to remain optimistic when you keep turning your gifts into recyclable assets that make a difference where it counts for you—and for those you serve. Today’s job market is not the place to be good at something that’s no longer needed. So ask yourself: Are you sending resumes for positions that are no longer viable? Is your present career positioned

for the past or for the future? Do you have a *Plan B* in place in case you lose your present job? Are you daring to use this time of change as an opportunity to pursue your dream career?

Record-setting UCLA basketball coach John Wooden shares some advice that rings true for every age: “It’s what you learn after you know it all

“Talent is only the start. You must keep working your talent.”

—Irving Berlin

that counts.” Don’t assume that your education ends the moment you complete college or graduate school. Those who find the most success are those who participate in lifelong learning. Most likely, you will have many varied careers in your lifetime, and many may have nothing to do with your major. If you’re lucky, what you learn in college is *how* to learn.

Education has morphed from a K through 12 to a K through 100 phenomenon. People are living much longer; in fact, one of the fastest growing demographics in the United States, in terms of percentage growth, is the 90-100 year range. One study found that 3 percent of those 90-100-year-olds were still working full-time; 1,200 of those were physicians.

Now, I don’t know if I would go to a doctor who’s 100—“We’ll start with blood letting and then move on to something more modern.” But seriously, why are so many of these seniors still working? While it’s true that some may need the money to make ends meet, for many, it’s because of the vitality and meaning their work brings to their lives.

## Truth #12: Be a Lifelong Learner by Updating Your Gifts into Recyclable Assets

If you haven’t noticed, the time of lifelong employment is over. Your best insurance policy may be to become a lifelong learner and take responsibility for your own short- and long-range career development.

Optimism is one of the natural by-products of productive living. Since you’re likely to be living—and therefore working—longer, you

“In times of rapid change, experience could be your worst enemy.”

—J. Paul Getty

what you could be doing in the future hasn’t even been invented yet. These are exciting times, and your job is to enjoy the challenge of staying relevant and valuable so that you can capitalize on those changes!

In his book *Future Shock*, Alvin Toffler said: “The illiterate of the future are not those who cannot read or write. They are those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn.” The hardest part is the *unlearning*. You have to let go of what you’re good at in order to learn new skills in areas where you have no idea what you’re even doing. And although that can seem threatening, the alternative is worse. If you’re already in the obsolete category, you want to surprise your current manager by developing your own recovery program before he or she is forced to do it for you under much less favorable conditions. What’s dangerous is to not evolve.

Now, don’t worry; working for others is not the only option here. No matter what the current unemployment numbers are, the American Dream isn’t dead! Wealth is still out there; it’s just moving from one sector to another. As my great uncle Harvey Swanson used to say to me on the farms of Illinois, “It’s easiest to ride a horse in the direction it’s going.” That’s a seminar in a sentence. In short, if you master skills that let you capitalize on future trends, you have nothing to fear from the future.

“In a time of drastic change, it is the learners who inherit the future. The learned usually find themselves equipped to live in a world that no longer exists.”

—Eric Hoffer

must keep developing your gifts into marketable and meaningful skills. If you’re not sure how to do that, take heart in the fact that half of

## Ride Trends in the Direction They Are Going

Life is all about riding—instead of resisting—trends. Eco-green jobs are riding a strong horse in a world that fears global warming and

supports environmental causes. Whether you agree with such views or not, if you have skills that match your passion to make a difference for our environment—then ride the horse!

While living in California's gold country, celebrated American author Mark Twain advised, "When everybody is out digging for gold, the business to be in is selling shovels." In a gold rush, some strike it rich and others fail, but they all need shovels. What do those mining the future need to find their gold? You can be there to help provide it.

Anthony Mayo, author of *Their Time: The Great Business Leaders of the 20th Century*, shares an observation for our

"Anything that won't sell, I don't want to invent."  
—Thomas Edison

times: "We discovered that people who were successful over a long period of time were contextually intelligent. They understood the context of their time, how to grow a business, find a new market opportunity and see some possibility others thought was dormant or dying." In these challenging economic times, it's too easy to focus on business that isn't there. When it looks like there are no opportunities, optimists look in a different direction or refocus with fresh eyes. Contextual intelligence suggests that today's treasure maps must change to adjust to the economic and political context for you to have any hope of finding treasure.

A teenager on a job search was tired of going from establishment to establishment and hearing the same message: "We're not hiring right now." He knew he wasn't alone, but it didn't make his hunt any easier. Spotting a handwritten sign in one window reading "Not Hiring," he realized how many managers were just as tired of answering the question as he was of asking it.

On his way home, he passed a sign shop. He stopped, smiled, and placed an order for a sign he was sure people would buy. From that day forward, he had two goals as he entered every establishment—get a job or sell a sign that read "Not Hiring." In fact, he might

"Find a job that you like so much that you would do it without compensation; then do it so well that people will pay you to continue."  
—Walt Disney

well have added a follow-up message: “Now that you know the innovation I can bring to my work, would you like to reconsider hiring me?”

## Use Training as a Strategic Advantage

Organizations can’t take advantage of the future without having the people with the right skills to make that happen. Whether they hire people with new skills or promote development within, successful companies address the development of new products or services and new knowledge in an integrated approach. By encouraging everyone to keep learning and hiring for strategic competencies, focused training becomes a powerful tool for inventing a profitable future for all involved.

“Find your own sweet spot—  
that intersection of personal  
passion and corporate need.”  
—Craig Steinman

Sometimes the simplest statements can open the biggest vistas into making strategic change work. Stephen R. Covey said it well: “Management is

efficiency in climbing the ladder of success; leadership determines whether the ladder is leaning against the right wall.”

No one wants to climb the ladder of success to a destination that isn’t worth reaching! Whether you’re an associate, a manager, a leader, or the CEO, it’s everyone’s job to make sure that the ladder to success is on the right wall. One thing worse than training people and losing them is not training them and keeping people who aren’t prepared for the future you want to create!

Too many former employees share the same statement in their exit interviews: “I’m leaving for a better opportunity.” No organization can afford to lose its best people. If you want people who are flexible enough to move to where the action is, let them know where they are going soon enough for them to refocus and retool with the skills needed. To keep your best people, make sure staying in your organization provides more opportunities than leaving!

If your leaders aren’t giving you the information you need, take the initiative to let them know you want to be part of your

organization's future. Ask your boss, "What's your sense of where the company is going, and what can I do to be part of helping us get there?" Use the magic phrase, "I really want to help make this work."

Are you doing anything now that others in your organization could positively gossip

about by the end of the year? We love making a difference, but it starts with taking the risk of adding value to projects that will allow that. Don't wait to be asked. Instead of settling for the status quo, volunteer to be part of a little adventure into unexplored territory that your company wants to claim for the future!

Finally, everyone talks about learning organizations, but they forget that the best organizations value both learning *and* unlearning. Their people must learn new competencies and unlearn habits that constrain them. If you're a leader, take time to share the skills and processes that will have to be left behind to make progress. No one wants to get stuck in the Dead Sea with no outlet when you want to master the whitewater rapids of your organization's uncharted future.

### **Truth #13: Always Have a Plan B—A "What I Could Do Next" Plan**

Whether you stay with the organization you are with or you leave, it is always wise to have options. Uncle Harvey's second piece of advice on the farms of Illinois was equally blunt and timely: "If the horse is dead, get off it!" Stop trying to find a job

"Somewhere in the belly of every company, someone is working away in obscurity on the project that 10 years from now everyone will acknowledge as the company's proudest moment. Why isn't that someone you?"

—Tom Peters

"Gaining an edge in the future depends upon the ability to hone the hyphen—to creatively bundle and re-bundle skills and knowledge. Cross-fertilization occurs when two or more unlikely fields combine. . . . The industries of the future all have hyphens in them: bio-tech, multi-media, eco-production."

—Kate Kane

with skills that are no longer needed. Today, you either learn new competencies or lose out to those who will. If one door isn't opening, then look for more doors!

Since it is likely that eventually your horse is going to die, always have a *Plan B*—A “*What I could do next*” *Plan*. I've added my own horse sense: “Since it's hard to know if your horse is dying, have at least two horses. In fact, in today's world, have a herd.” Take every opportunity to develop your interests and gifts into a set of competencies that will continue to add value.

## You're Going to Be Forty-five Anyway

One young woman was stressed over how long it would take to get the degree she needed to pursue her dream. She complained, “If I take it one night course at a time, I'll probably be 45 by the time I finish.”

Somewhat annoyed by the fact that I had already passed the milestone she considered old, I replied, “Optimistically, you'll be 45 anyway. You're either 45 with a degree or 45 without it. How long have you been thinking about this?”

“If a man empties his purse into his head, no one can take it away from him. An investment in knowledge always pays the best interest.”

—Ben Franklin

The young woman replied, “Three years.” I said with a smile, “You could have been 42!”

Learn from this situation—and don't wait a day longer! At all times, invest 5 percent of your time in your next career

or in starting your own business. Look for cross-training opportunities. Volunteer for your organization's strategic projects. Exercise your purpose by donating your time and skills to causes you care about. All will help you turn your interests and gifts into a satisfying new career or your own business start-up. If downsizing is imminent or you hate your job, invest 10 percent of your time. Don't wait for them to get rid of you; begin to establish your own plan for what you will do next. Your optimism and security doesn't come from holding onto the past, but rather in helping to invent the future.



I'm not suggesting that you have to leave your current career or organization in order to be successful. I am saying that by having more than one option, you have choices. By embracing change and learn-

ing strategic skills, you become the gold your organization can't afford to lose while you still have the option to take advantage of new opportunities should they surface or become necessary.

A manager coming back from a seminar on *Making Change Work* was told by one of her longtime nurses, "You need to know I won't be one of your change agents. You see, on the freeway of life, I'm in the slow lane looking for an off-ramp." As you might imagine, it wasn't long before she earned the right to take that off-ramp!

In bad economic times, organizations have to *right size and right-skill*. If you were a corporation, would you invest in you? If not, get busy becoming a recyclable asset.

And if you *do* lose your job, take heart. *USA Today* reporter Del Jones observed about people who had turned layoffs into new opportunities: "Those who lose jobs in recessions can land on their feet, and even thrive. They say being jobless can steel and motivate people to work long and hard hours, teach them to be self-reliant and to distrust safety nets, and to spur them into fields they are passionate about. The result, at least in this instance, is success and contentment, financially and otherwise."

Years ago, the author Lee Child lost his job in television. The new management decided to change directions and cut

costs, including his job. Lee felt betrayed by his own naiveté. The rules of the game had changed, and he hadn't noticed.

With the support of his family, he decided to become his own boss and take a new path. With an appreciation for which stories connect to readers and with his own rich experiences, he decided to try his hand at writing thriller novels. He introduced a character he could understand—Jack Reacher, a man downsized out of the army in the prime of

"Spend one extra hour every day studying your chosen subject. In five years you will be a national expert in that field."

—Earl Nightingale

"When your mind is open, mentors are everywhere."

—Robert McGarvey

“Drucker’s Maxims: Pick the future against the past. Focus on opportunity rather than on problems. Choose your own direction rather than climb on the bandwagon. Aim high. Aim for something that will make a difference rather than for something that is ‘safe’ and easy to do.”

his life. Since that fateful day he lost his job, Lee Child has gone on to write numerous international best sellers.

Discussing his career transition, Lee writes: “If you’re fired at 40, it’s not about hurt and betrayal and fear. It’s about opportunity. By that time in your life, you’ve learned a few things. You’ve got skills and

work habits. You’re in charge. . . . Try something. Anything. Sit back, take a breath, believe in yourself, identify your dream, and go for it 110 percent. Trust me, your motivation will never be as strong. And the chance might never come your way again.”

Indeed, layoffs and life changes sometimes free you to pursue what you have wanted to do all along. Early in life, many get stuck doing things other people thought was best for their future. At some point, if you are fortunate, you may just have a dream or even a calling that breaks forth with power, purpose, and passion in a way that catches the world off guard. Don’t be your own worst enemy in hiding your dream. Instead, be led by it in developing the skills that can deliver that dream!

## When Attitude, Skills, and Opportunity Come Together, Mastery and Magic Happen

“Restlessness is destiny calling.”

—Ian Percy

When Susan Boyle took the stage to audition for *Britain’s Got Talent*, the judges and many in the audience snickered

and rolled their eyes as this frumpy, middle-aged Scottish church volunteer shared her dream of becoming a professional singer. But when she opened her mouth to sing “I Dreamed a Dream”—a ballad from treasured musical *Les Misérables*—angels soared, jaws dropped, judges let out audible gasps, and hundreds in the audience stood to

applaud and roar their approval as she sang her dream into reality. She ended up second in the competition but first in the hearts of many new fans around the world.

On one day in April 2009, Susan's hidden gift and dream exploded onto the world stage. Within hours, YouTube postings of her performance had more than 20 million approving viewers. Her *Britain's Got Talent* videos were the most watched YouTube videos in 2009, attracting more than 120 million viewers worldwide, more than the next top three most-watched YouTube videos combined. Millions were brought to tears merely watching her performance. Many have focused on the need to not judge a book by its cover. That is a valuable lesson, but, more important, you should never let your gifts and your dreams die within you. Never forget that authentic gifts and empowering dreams produce amazing performances when unleashed. Optimism is born when attitude, skills, and opportunity come together at the right time to deliver excellence.

It's amazing to witness someone realize his or her true role in life. Although my son struggled with school and in his early jobs, his drive and his gifts were truly unleashed when he felt called into the ministry. I remember watching, with tears rolling from my eyes, as he delivered his first sermon. It was incredibly clear that he was exactly where he belonged—and was being used for a mighty purpose. I knew that while he might never be rich financially, he is certainly rich where it counts. He gets up every day, ready to learn and serve in a job that he loves. There's nothing better to build authentic optimism than finding your calling.

“Choose a work you love and you will never have to labor a day in your life.”

—Confucius

## Finding a Career That Matches Your Dream

Need help in finding your next career move? Try answering some of these questions:

- What activity makes your heart sing?
- What talents do you have that are still untapped?

- What dreams are unfulfilled?
- What gifts do others repeatedly see in you?
- What training have you always wanted to pursue but have not yet started?
- Looking back, what career choice do you regret *not* making?
- Is it really too late to get the training you need to live your dream?
- What would you do if you knew you would not fail?

Don't worry about the perfect plan, job, or time to start. Just *start!* Once you're in motion, every day will allow course corrections. If your training doesn't live up to your expectations, then make a move. When you find better opportunities beyond what you planned, make a move. Keep looking for what fits you.

## Beat Your Impostor Feelings on the Road to Lifelong Learning

"I am always doing that which I cannot do, in order that I may learn how to do it."

—Pablo Picasso

But, you might wonder, "What if they find out that I'm just an impostor?" Studies have shown that up to 70 percent of us have *impostor feelings*. In other

words, we feel as though we don't have the experience or the skills to meet all the challenges we face. I'm not at all suggesting that you are indeed any kind of impostor. People who know you and your work most likely rate your performance as effective. But inside, you may feel the same way that many others do—"If they ever found out how much I don't know about what I'm doing, I would be in serious trouble!"

The fact is that *no* one knows it all, and the people to worry about are those who *think* they do! In recent years, there *has* been an admittedly alarming increase in the number of things you know nothing about. You may very well own things that you still don't know how to use. If you've lost your manual, your only hope is that

you have a young child who will teach you how to use it for the price of a cookie! So you're not alone here. The only places that perfect people exist are in self-help books and training clips. They get to edit out the errors! You live in the real world where real people have real struggles living their dreams and bouncing back from their mistakes on the way to mastery.

Lifelong learning is seldom easy but always exciting. Even when you have a gift and want to learn, you'll make mistakes! But by taking the risk to live your dreams and learn new skills, you'll be on your way to mastery and meaning. There is joy in such a journey and satisfaction when all your work bears fruit. This is all about making the commitment to begin . . . now!

## Truth #14: You Become an Old Dog When You Stop Doing New Tricks

While we're tackling excuses, don't feel you're ever too old to live your calling. Everyone talks about eventually being over the hill. Age has a way of making us face signs that are hard to ignore. But even if your older body can't do some of the things it used to do effortlessly, you can still continue to learn. You can still make a difference. The face in your mirror may not match the playful soul within, and those old people you see at your high school reunion actually went to school with *you*! But life is less about what you've lost and more about what you've got left to give and do.

"Work adds life to your years, and it actually adds years onto your life."

—Leon Levitt, an 81-year-old machinist trainee

There was a brief scene in the movie *Finding Neverland* where an admiring patron complimented playwright J. M. Barrie after watching his play *Peter Pan*. She commented on how her departed husband would have appreciated the play: "He would have loved it—the pirates and the Indians. After all, he was just a boy. He was just a boy to the very end."

Instead of sliding graciously into old age, find new ways to live a super second life. After all, as a girl or boy to the very end, you still have a few more hills you want to climb, and no matter your age,

“The most fun thing about life is that you don’t really know. You just let life unfold. Of course, you’ve got to get in there and make sure you’re the one stirring things.”

—Sally Field

you’re never really finished. After all, Colonel Sanders started the Kentucky Fried Chicken franchise in his 60s. Today’s seniors aren’t done dreaming, working, or living. It’s been said, “You can’t teach an old dog new tricks!” Well,

you become an old dog when you *stop* doing new tricks.

Will organizations want old dogs? You bet they will. More and more companies will be looking for well-trained, experienced workers willing to be a contingent workforce who will do contract work on projects as needed. If you want work to supplement your retirement income and increase your motivation and personal satisfaction, try selling your company on keeping your skills current and using you on projects. You can always keep your golf, travel, and other hobbies—and still find ways to keep learning, serving, and earning!

Lifelong education is the antidote to feeling victimized by a world of change. If you want to be optimistic, keep learning and keep turning your gifts into recyclable assets and your dreams into reality. As one wise retiree reflected: “To live life to the fullest, keep learning, keep laughing and keep lovin’! You can change the order, but keep all three!”

# Your Health Habits Impact Your Attitude

*“I tried every diet in the book. I tried some that weren’t in the book. I tried eating the book. It tasted better than most of the diets.”*

—Dolly Parton

**A**s an optimist, you want a body built to last and a quality of life worth living. By taking care of yourself and being responsible for your health habits, you’re more likely to live longer, feel better, and reduce your medical costs. There is also evidence that some health habits have a strong impact on your attitude.

Most reputable health organizations have a consistent list of recommendations: get adequate sleep, limit alcohol consumption, and stop smoking. Two critical health habits on that list are worth addressing here—what you eat and getting enough exercise.

## Eat Less and Exercise More

As a nation, we eat way too much. You may be able to get away with it when you’re younger and naturally active, but as you age, you are

likely to become more sedentary and your metabolism declines. Right at the time that you need less food, you tend to eat too much. More and more young people have weight issues—and the health problems that go with it.

“He asked me to bring some loose clothing to the gym. If I had any loose clothing, I wouldn’t be coming down there.”

—Al Walker

Unfortunately—even with all the fitness and diet programs combined—Americans collectively lost a total of one pound last year. Okay, there is no research to prove that. But when you look at our

collective girth and the average American diet, it is no wonder that many of us are far from the ideal in health habits.

Perfect diets and perfect exercise plans exist only in infomercials. Most of the new and innovative exercise equipment you buy ends up as expensive clothes hangers. Eventually, they are wheeled out to the curb for a garage sale and bought by another well-meaning citizen—who often duplicates the same cycle.

You’re probably asking, “Isn’t this supposed to be a book about optimism?” Yes, but remember: Optimists are realists. You want to be aware of the practical obstacles you’ll have to overcome to make changes. You also want to know why you should even bother to change health habits that you know won’t come easy.

Let’s start by looking at the advantages of small changes in your health habits. After all, why watch what you eat and exercise daily if it’s not worth the effort?

## Optimists Want a Body Ready for Action

On average, people are living longer these days. If you’re like most, it isn’t just the number of years you live that matters to you; it’s the quality of those years. You want to be active for as long as possible, which means that you need a body ready for action. The less healthy you are, the fewer choices you have.

Do you want to travel, participate in sports, or live an overall active lifestyle? Well, doing these things when you’re overweight



and totally out of shape is much more difficult. You don't want to just watch sports when you can participate. You don't want to limit your trips to watching other people's adventures on the Internet; you want to go there yourself.

At 91, my father has already written his obituary. One short sentence ends, "and he died quietly in his sleep." He's already visualized how he wants to go! Reading his premature obit for the first time made the family laugh, but isn't that what we all want? Optimistically, you want to truly live to the last day you are alive.

Of course, you can't control everything that will affect your personal health or longevity. You can, however, control your diet, exercise, and other health habits to make it more likely that you'll be able to live the life you want. There's an added advantage. Even if you face health challenges, serious accidents, or debilitating diseases, when you're in shape, your body is better prepared to overcome any physical challenge that you encounter. If you plan to be *patient active* in working with your medical team to fight for your own recovery, you want a body that's in shape and ready to fight to the last round!

Now, I write this chapter with a healthy dose of humility. My diet has a documented *fudge factor* that includes infrequent but deeply cherished doses of hot fudge, chocolate chip cookies, popcorn at the movies, french fries. . . . Confession is good for the soul, but need I go further?

However, I've found ways to curb my indulgences and increase my positive food choices by keeping these treats

"I don't diet. I just don't eat as much as I'd like to."

—Linda Evangelista

out of my home. I'm then forced to go out and find the source of my temptation, which has a way of keeping my doses in check. At home, we prepare tasty but healthy meals with smaller servings to help balance my rushed fast-food purchases as I race to catch a plane to my next speaking engagement.

You don't have to eat perfectly to make a difference in your health and your attitude; the same is true in terms of exercise. I've seen myself run, and I'm not going to win any Olympic medals in track. While some individuals have bodies built for athletic

excellence and professional-level competition, most of us have a body that, when healthy, can give us the vitality, strength, and mobility we need to live the life we want.

So whether you like your body or not, there is no replacement. Take care of your body, or it just may not take care of you! Being fit is all about being healthy. You don't need to look like a star athlete or a diet like a vegetarian monk. Okay, aspire to that if you want, but it's more important to develop some consistent exercise and eating habits that you can live with for the long haul.

## The Exercise Attitude Connection

A vigorous five mile walk will do more good for an unhappy but otherwise healthy person than all the medicine and psychology in the world."

—Paul Dudley White, MD

There is yet another benefit to regular exercise and a sound diet; both can impact your attitude and your activity level. In fact, research shows that exercise can help reduce stress and anxiety, decrease mild

depression, and produce a positive emotional effect. Exercise increases the biochemical reactions that increase feel-good chemicals like norepinephrine, serotonin and endogenous opioids, which, I promise, have nothing to do with aliens encountered in *Star Trek*!

Just using our large muscles for something as simple as a good walk is incompatible with maintaining depressive thoughts. Exercise also results in increased energy, improved sleep patterns, and a general feeling of self-accomplishment for sticking to goals and developing new positive habits. In a world where so many things are out of your power, the self-discipline and confidence generated from good health habits will increase your sense of personal control. Optimism is all about taking action; good health habits lead to a body ready for accomplishment.

Even if you're not in shape now, with time, you'll be able to walk or run a couple of miles, take a hike up a hill, or spend an evening dancing or playing basketball—without needing a standby

ambulance ready. Then you'll understand why Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "The first wealth is health."

"The key to cardiovascular fitness is consistency rather than intensity."

—James Rippe, MD

A private school that I worked with in Hawaii placed strong emphasis on physical fitness. Middle school youths were required to work up to running nine miles before they graduated. If a teen said about any topic in high school, "I can't do that!"—teachers could say, "That's what you said about running nine miles, but you applied yourself, worked up to that distance, and you did it. You can do this the same way!" Now, that's teaching optimism by building a track record of overcoming milestones on the way to success.

It's unlikely that someone is going to require you to run nine miles or force you to eat more healthfully. Your high school coach isn't there blowing any whistles at you, demanding 20 push-ups or sending you on wind sprints down the field. It's your health and your life; it's therefore up to you. This is your chance to get your body working for you.

## Truth #15: Eat Smart—Make Progress Not Perfection

The easier place to begin is with your eating habits. You may have seen the bumper sticker that reads, "Life is uncertain; eat dessert first." Don't worry

"The more you eat, the less flavor; the less you eat, the more flavor."

—Chinese Proverb

about losing your *fudge factor*. An occasional treat is fine, but don't let it become the norm. You don't have to eliminate every stop to your local fast-food joint—just don't stop every time you go by. It's progress—not perfection—that counts.

Most people are far too worried about what they eat between Christmas and New Year's Day, instead of being concerned about what they eat between New Year's Day and the next Christmas. Building good eating habits is not about having to eat what you hate. It's about learning to love what is good for you. Prepared well, a meal

“Countless people tell me they would like to eat better, but they don’t want to ‘give up’ tasty food. Rather than thinking about what they can’t have, they should think about what they can eat.”

—Sybil Stanton

of whole-grain breads, fruits, vegetables, and low-fat meat, poultry, or fish, along with dairy products, can taste fantastic. Need more zing to satisfy your taste buds? There are spices out there that can do the job. Sure, it may take time to develop a taste for healthy foods, but it’s

well worth the effort. I, for one, used to refuse nonfat milk—none of that blue milk for me. My wife gradually added it to our low-fat milk until it was all nonfat milk. Now, even low-fat milk tastes like cream. Tastes can adjust.

Make small changes. Experiment with new recipes. When you find one that you love, prepare it more often. Make vats of the recipe, and freeze small portions for quick healthy meals. Making changes that last is not about losing food you love; it’s about finding healthy food you love as much. You can change your preferences and impact your health.

There is more that you can do to guide your changes. Remember, good and bad habits are both hard to break. Instead of listing any particular diet, consult with your doctor, a registered dietitian, or any reputable nutrition professional.

## Truth #16: The Only Good Exercise Plan Is One You Do Consistently

“People who cannot find time for recreation are obliged sooner or later to find time for illness.”

—John Wanamaker

You know that you need to get moving, but what exercise should you choose? When asked if football is good exercise, former Oklahoma football coach Bud Wilkerson replied,

“No. In football, there are 22 people on the field in desperate need of rest. And there are 50,000 people in the stands in desperate need of exercise.” Don’t just be a watcher; be a doer. Exercise doesn’t just

impact your attitude. Research shows that people who exercise regularly catch fewer colds, maintain their weight more easily, have a higher energy level, and live longer. Not a bad deal, whether you are an optimist or not!

The trick is not in agreeing that exercise is important; that's not a debatable issue any longer. The real goal is to find something you enjoy doing consistently—enough to become a lifelong habit. To be safe and smart, you might want to start by working with a credentialed fitness professional to get the most out of your exercise plan. Here are some habits you can live with:

- Get together with friends who like the same exercise so that on the days when you just don't feel like it, they'll help pull you along.
- If appropriate to your current health status, join a team in a sport you enjoy. Winning and losing together with teammates is an easy way to sneak in increased activity.
- Instead of watching your TV, get a Nintendo Wii. Let your TV take you and your family members through your paces for fun and health.
- Ride your bike or walk to your local store (or to work, if possible) rather than driving your car.
- Take the stairs instead of the elevator, get fewer dings and more exercise by parking your car farther from the store entrance, walk your pets regularly, and, at a minimum, move more, and then move for longer periods of time and at a faster pace.

You'll experience the payoff in attitude and health. You don't have to impress anyone else with your plan or your progress. Just get started by picking something you will do consistently.

Martin Luther used to say, "When you rest, you rust." Exercise is important, but don't forget to partake in some form of relaxation as well. A moment alone, meditation, yoga, or

"The difference between interest and commitment is I'm interested in losing 15 pounds."

—Ken Blanchard

prayer can do wonders to recharge your spirit. Every person relaxes differently, so find the method that works best for you. And while we're talking about relaxation, don't forget to get a good night's sleep, which will come more easily once you start exercising on a regular basis. Waking up refreshed has a way of helping you maintain a positive and optimistic attitude.

## Take Care of Your Body—It Will Help Take Care of You

Making small changes now in your eating, exercise, and health habits will improve your health and your optimistic attitude now and for years to come. Take care of your body, and it will do a better job of taking care of you.

The lessons in this chapter aren't difficult or complicated. It doesn't provide a specific diet or exercise to follow. There isn't one that will work for everyone. But by taking care of your own body and taking responsibility for your health habits, you're apt to live longer, feel better, and improve your attitude. Make it a habit, and you'll become more optimistic.

"If I had one wish, just give me health, and I'll get the rest."

—John Garner

Like everything in this book, becoming optimistic is all about taking action. In fact, that's the focus of the next chapter.

# Optimists Embrace Action

*“If we listened to our intellect, we’d never have a love affair. We’d never have a friendship. We’d never go into business, because we’d be cynical. Well, that’s nonsense. You’ve got to jump off cliffs all the time to build your wings on the way down.”*

—Ray Bradbury

**L***earned Optimism* author Martin Seligman observed: “Happiness divides into the domains of past, present and future. The past is your feelings of contentment or well-being. It’s the life story you tell yourself. Present is what’s usually called happiness. It’s how you are feeling right now. And future is your optimism.”

Making a move today, in the present, is the start of progress. After all, as Will Rogers loved to say: “Even if you’re on the right track, you’ll get run over if you just sit there.” Optimists cultivate a bias for action. You can’t change what has happened to you, but you can embrace the action imperative and do what you can to invent a better future—starting immediately. Optimism is all about making a move to turn your worries and concerns into constructive action.

I once had a client who simply refused to act. After a few sessions together, it became clear to me that her past experiences with

“Isn’t it amazing how many people tip-toe cautiously through life hoping to make it safely to death?”

—Carl E. Hiebert

therapy had provided her with a hiding place from life, one where she had cultivated a vast array of excuses to avoid risk. After experiencing enough of her painful ruminations, I had

given her a between-session assignment that required her to risk taking action.

It was a small step, but after a moment’s pause, she said with concern, “I’m just not ready. I need a few more sessions to get my head together.” I had learned already that humor was effective in breaking her self-defeating responses. I replied with a smile, “Don’t go in there. I know what is in your head, and it’s not helpful. You’d do better having a vacation with a run-of-the-mill enemy than being alone with your own thoughts for a week.”

She laughed. She completed the assignment and was proud of her progress at the next session. She was soon hooked on celebrating her progress instead of avoiding choices. Who has time to over-analyze the past when you are having fun making a difference today!

So ask yourself: Are you hooked on living life to the fullest? The tragedy of life is not how soon it ends, but how long you wait to begin it. To become more optimistic, spend a lot less time ruminating about what has already happened and a lot more time choosing, moving, trying, tasting, experiencing, serving, enjoying . . . living.

## **Truth #17: Get out of the Rearview Mirror and Move into the Choices out Your Front Window**

After all, whether you like it or not, time keeps marching forward with or without your active involvement. It’s like a moving vehicle with no brakes. There are no available off-ramps. There’s no reverse, and you can’t turn the car off. That’s why your rearview mirror is smaller than your front window.

Can you imagine driving a vehicle with a huge rearview mirror and a small six-inch opening to guide your driving? That would be one crazy ride, and a dangerous one at that. While you’re busy



worrying about what's already happened, you'd be likely to hit a tree out the front window. So don't live your life trapped in the rearview mirror! Learn what you can from the past, but concentrate on what you can do now to shape your future.

"Be quick, but don't hurry. Being quick is a matter of being decisive and knowing where you're going. Quickness is always under your control. Hurrying is frantic and out of control."

—John Wooden

Your life is lived out the front window—so keep moving and making choices. Every choice you make changes your future ever so slightly. Are you attracted to the mountaintops or the valleys? You pick the terrain, and don't just travel the beaten path others have turned into highways. Take a few back roads. Forge a few trails of your own. The actions you take will generate both successes and failures on your journey. Conrad Hilton observed: "Success seems to be connected with action. Successful people keep moving. They make mistakes, but they don't quit."

You won't want to quit when you see life as an adventure waiting to be experienced. What has happened in the past may limit some of your choices, but the choices that remain are so abundant, you'll never run out of adventure if you seek it.

## **Truth #18: You Miss 100 Percent of the Shots You Never Take**

Hockey great Wayne Gretzky credited one of his early coaches for making him aware of an important truth. After pulling him aside after a difficult loss, the coach said, "You out-skated everyone out there on the ice, but you didn't take a shot on net. Miss some tomorrow night! You miss 100 percent of the shots you never take." Gretzky took the advice and, of course,

"It often happens that I wake up at night and begin to think of a serious problem and decide that I must tell the Pope about it. Then I wake up completely and remember that I am the Pope."

—Pope John XXIII

went on to be the most prolific scorer in National Hockey League history.

Mistakes and failures are the price you pay for achieving any success. Michael Jordan didn't make the basketball team in high school until his senior year. Walt Disney was fired from a newspaper job for lack of creativity. Babe Ruth had 51 straight strikeouts the year he hit 60 home runs. Yet every single one of these legendary achievers knew that setbacks and failures were part of the price you paid to play in the game. Thomas Edison is credited with saying, "To have a great idea, have a lot of them." On the way to his historic invention, he found 5,000 ways how not to make a lightbulb, and every one of them was intriguing. Now, that's a history of persistent action.

Innovation requires that you keep generating strategic ideas. Sales success requires that you keep asking for the sale. Leaders do whatever they can to build an environment that fosters motivation and results. Not every idea is implemented. Not every buyer buys. Not every associate will respond to your influence. But not even bothering to try guarantees failure.

"Do not wait; the time will never be 'just right.' Start where you stand, and work with whatever tools you may have at your command, and better tools will be found as you go along."

—Napoleon Hill

The Oscar-winning best picture *Chariots of Fire* is more than a movie about runners; it's a tale about what motivates humans to achieve. In this true story of two men competing to bring home medals for Britain from the 1924 Paris Olympics, we learn something

about optimism and achievement. Harold Abrahams, played by Ben Cross, was a son of a Lithuanian immigrant and Brit to the core. Ian Charleson played Eric Liddell, a gifted Scot of deep faith and the son of missionaries in China.

Neither man had ever lost a race until the first time these two talented runners competed. Harold's immaturity surfaced when he lost the race with Liddell, and he declared to his fiancée Sybil (played by Alice Krige), "If I can't win, I won't run!" Sybil replied wisely, "If you don't run, you can't win." In spite of scheduling and

coaching challenges and strong competition, both men persevered and went on to win Olympic gold.

Most success stories involve failures, perseverance, resourcefulness—and, above all, action. True optimists both lose and win more frequently. Failures don't keep them down for long; they bounce back quickly to get right back in the game. You've doubtlessly had your share of failures and setbacks, but that's the price you pay to lead a life worth living. Just remember: You miss 100 percent of the shots you never take, and you can't possibly win a race that you don't bother to run. Are you ready for a little adventure? Miss a few shots today—but take them!

## Truth #19: Life Works Best with the Three P's of Optimism—Position, Perform, and Persist

The only things you truly control are your actions, and some might say even that is in question on Mondays. You do control the Three P's of Optimism—Position, Perform and Persist.

Not every action is worth pursuing. As an optimist, you must learn to *position* your actions where you're more likely to produce meaningful

“Don't let what you cannot do interfere with what you can do.”

—John Wooden,  
UCLA Basketball Coach

results. It's all about playing in the right game. Let your purpose and mission guide your positioning, and then get busy serving the right people and developing the appropriate gifts to match the challenge the times require.

But finding your focus is only half the battle—you also need to *perform*! Don't rest on your talents; keep working them. Excellence must be earned and reearned every day, so play your best. Keep after the pursuit of quality by actively improving your performance every day in the games that count to you. Be a better professional, leader, spouse, parent, volunteer, citizen, and friend.

Finally, *persist*, because when you think you've arrived with the right positioning and skills, things are already changing again. Customers are ready for the next wave of innovation; new

“The only man I know who behaves sensibly is my tailor; he takes my measures anew each time he sees me. The rest go on with their old measurements and expect me to fit them.”

—George Bernard Shaw

competencies are being required; the global economy is soaring or falling; your children are growing into new challenges. Pretend that you’re a tailor, and take your measurements anew at every chance you get. Be ready to reposition before your competitors beat you to it, and remain open to discussions about changing expectations. Adjust your personal development plan to match the opportunities and challenges that emerge.

It’s imperative to realize that your job in life isn’t to zero in on a stationary target; instead, you must think of yourself as a missile chasing after a moving plane taking evasive actions. Only one thing is certain in a life of never-ending change: You have no excuse for being bored. After all, who wants to be done when you can choose a life of adventure and meaningful discovery?

Control what you can—position, perform, and persist.

“Act fast. . . . Leaders in a crisis must not lose their rare opportunity to act. The difficulty is that just when decisions are more easily accepted, they’re hardest to make. All business decisions are made with incomplete information, and that’s especially true in the heat of a crisis. At the same time, the stakes are much higher than usual. Every instinct tells you to decide more slowly than usual, yet it’s vital to decide more quickly.”

—Geoff Colvin

Make movement matter! Individuals are not the only ones who need to embrace the action imperative. To truly lead organizations into the future requires an equal commitment to action.

## Truth #20: Act Fast with Focus and Flexibility to Make Change Work

War provides a meaningful laboratory for leadership under stress. Marine General Peter Pace reminds us of an insight all leaders need to take seriously:

“One thing the Marine Corps teaches is that it’s better to be doing something than doing nothing. If you stay where you are, you’re in the position where your enemy wants you to be. If you start doing something, you are changing the rules of the game.” Combat is a verb. It isn’t a place. It is an act. Movement matters. You keep asking yourself as a leader, “Now, what are you going to do next?”

Are you a leader of action? Maybe it is time to ask yourself that same question every day—“Well, leader, what are you going to do?”

You and your team may not be facing combat, but in these competitive and challenging economic times, you are facing a battle of a different kind. By continuing to move, you keep changing the rules of the game for both your competitors and

“Too many think inaction is the least risky path. Sometimes action is the most conservative and safest path. Not doing anything is exceedingly dangerous.”

—Fred Smith, FedEx CEO

your customers. It’s easiest to take aim at you when you are sitting still, resting on past successes, and coasting on autopilot. To bet on sustaining the past is a losing hand in today’s rapidly changing world. Your customers are depending on you to give them a strategic advantage; you won’t do that by refining past successes. You get it by helping them invent the future.

Make a commitment to continuous movement; you are more likely to take advantage of changing landscapes and emerging opportunities when you are on the move. Too many wait for stifling task force recommendations, only to find their competitors well on their way to claiming a market share victory because of their quick action. Even if movement requires adjustment and change, you are at least changing the rules of the game, serving your customers, and keeping your competitors guessing.

## **Ready, Fire, Aim—Feisty Prototypers Win the Day**

Complaining that the world is moving too fast is like complaining that rocks are hard. It’s true but useless. Your job is to ride the changes worth making!

“One of the assets I look for in a team or a leader is a bias for action and a willingness to say ‘We can do it,’ coupled with a solid strategy. The way I interpret it, execution and commitment are absolutely essential to any strategy of initiative in an era too full of plans, processes, and procrastination.”

—Simon Cooper, Ritz-Carlton  
President and CEO

detailed planning just slows down progress. The winners in a world of constant change start by charting a strategic direction. Then, they refine their strategy by simultaneously trying a number of promising strategies and using frequent tests and aggressive milestones to make the necessary course corrections. That requires fixing all flat tires while you move and getting out of dead ends quickly.

Change leaders are masters of focus. Quick due diligence shouldn’t trap you in inaction; it should free you and your team to bravely pursue strategic innovation. There’s a distinction between speed and bravery. Organizations evolve the way nature evolves: Bad innovations die, and good innovations survive. Bravery requires leaders and teams to take a chance on themselves and their ideas and be willing to watch them die

“The plain fact is that no one . . . utterly no one . . . has even an inkling about tomorrow’s winners or losers. The good news is that this is good news. If you are unclear about the next step, then there is only one variety of sensible advice: Ready, Fire, Aim.”

—Tom Peters

What we need to invent the future is what Tom Peters calls “feisty prototypers.” He cites Stanford researchers who examined 72 projects from 36 companies in Asia, Europe, and the United States. They found that squeezing together and streamlining a rationalized product development process was trounced by the just-do-it, experiential, prototyping approach. With an uncertain market and rapidly changing technology,

if they don’t produce results. Every improvement is the result of change, but not every change proves to be an improvement worth making. Your job as a leader is to find which changes are worth pursuing as quickly as possible.

Milliken is a leading textile company committed to quality, innovation, and change. They

have a heritage of getting things done, but done right. Milliken's Gazelle Award reinforces their bias for action. It was built on a lesson learned on the plains of Africa: "Gazelles are the second fastest animal and are capable of quick changes in direction. When a lion wakes up it has one mission, run faster than the slowest and weakest gazelle.

When a gazelle wakes up it has one mission, run faster than the fastest lion. When either wakes up, they know one thing—they are going to be running!" That is good advice for all of today's leaders and organizations.

"The great end of life is not knowledge, but action. What men need is as much knowledge as they can organize into action; give them more, and it may become injurious. Some men are heavy and stupid from undigested learning."

—Thomas Henry Huxley

## Now Is the Time for Action—Not Perfection

In addition to the Three P's of Optimism, there are also the Four P's of Pessimism—Perfection, Procrastination, Paralysis, and Powerlessness. One prepares you for action; the other results in avoidance and inaction. People who are overly concerned about doing every little thing right may very well wait so long to do anything that they end up feeling powerless—and doing nothing at all. Don't turn a two-week decision about what to do into a doctorate in analysis paralysis. While you do need enough information to organize into action, too much of it merely slows down your progress. Seek different perspectives early, and then make one choice at a time. As Yogi Berra would say, "When you come to a fork in the road, take it."

Remember to take the trap out of achieving excellence by striving for it without waiting for the perfect thought, the perfect action, or the perfect time. You won't even do this perfectly, but that's okay. Neither does anyone else.

Norman Vincent Peale, often called the father of positive

"You cannot escape the responsibility of tomorrow by evading it today."

—Abraham Lincoln

“One of the illusions of life is that the present hour is not the critical, decisive hour. Write it on your heart that every day is the best day of the year.”

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

thinking, knew that any action can help build your confidence when he wrote: “Action is a great restorer and builder of confidence. Inaction is not only the result, but the cause, of fear. Perhaps the action you

take will be successful; perhaps different action or adjustments will have to follow. But any action is better than no action at all. So don’t wait for trouble to intimidate or paralyze you. Make a move.”

When you act, take pride in your progress. Abraham Lincoln had to lead and live in tough times. He shared a reassuring perspective we might all do well to remember: “The best thing about the future is that it comes one day at a time.”

Life is all about one day at a time. So today, invest your worry time in constructive action and feel the pride and optimism that purposeful action generates.



# Optimists Dispute Catastrophic Thoughts

*“People are always blaming their circumstances for what they are. I don’t believe in circumstances. The people who get on in this world are the people who get up and look for the circumstances they want, and, if they can’t find them, make them.”*

—George Bernard Shaw

Okay, so you can shape your own circumstance and make your own luck up to a point, but there’s no denying that bad luck *does* exist. We’ve all had our share of unpleasant days; we’ve all suffered and experienced major disappointments. We’ve had to deal with the pain of loss as well as the random misery that nature can unleash.

Good employees sometimes lose their jobs through no fault of their own, and even the best sales professionals lose their share of sales from time to time. Hurricanes level some homes while leaving others only feet away completely intact. Illness and accidents can take lives seemingly years too early.

“Life is tough, but I’m tougher.”

—Andy Rooney

The glass sometimes is more than half empty. In the short run, everything doesn’t always happen for the best. Have you

had a big enough dose of reality for this chapter? I hope so. Yes, as we discussed in the beginning—life is difficult.

But no matter how bad the hand you’re dealt in life, you can still strive to make the best of what happens. Optimists have learned to master the mental and emotional inner dialogue that allows you to do just that. Jeffrey Lawrence Benjamin, author of *How to Get What You Want Now*, said it well: “The most important things ever said are the things you’ve said to yourself.” However, what you say to yourself in the face of adversity is not always constructive.

## The Heart of the Optimism Technique

*Learned Optimism* author Martin Seligman confirms how ineffective our self-talk can be: “One often has ‘catastrophic thoughts,’ feelings that everything is wrong and that nothing is going to change. We teach people to think of these thoughts as if they were being said by some external person whose mission in life is to make them miserable. Then we have them dispute those thoughts, and that’s the heart of the optimism technique.” In short, your thoughts have the power to make you either more miserable or more optimistic. Depression often involves a difficulty in controlling negative thoughts. Our goal here is to help you shape your own self-talk to maintain a more optimistic attitude—even in the face of adversity.

“When you are confronted with a situation that is beyond your control, recognize that you still have a choice: you can decide how you will react to it. You can accept it and direct your energies to the areas where you can make an impact.”

—Stephen R. Covey

Martin Seligman also observes: “Positive thinking often involves trying to believe upbeat statements such as, ‘Every day, in every way, I’m getting better and better’ in the absence of evidence, or even in the face of contrary evidence. Learned optimism, in contrast, is about accuracy. It is how you cope with

negative statements that has an effect. Usually the negative beliefs that follow adversity are inaccurate. . . . Learned optimism works not through an unjustifiable positivity about the world but through the power of ‘non-negative’ thinking.”

It’s important to grasp that this isn’t another book about

visualizing success, because merely visualizing won’t guarantee positive results. Even if 100 sales professionals imagine success with the same client, only one is actually going to *get* the sale. Those who don’t get that signature on the bottom line aren’t going to be writing a testimonial for that book on visualizing sales success.

Optimism is instead about facing and taking advantage of reality—even unsettling reality. Expecting unrealistic results may actually *increase* your dissatisfaction. Even positive people know they aren’t going to win them all; however, your goal is to improve your batting average. You also want to limit your downtime in the face of setbacks and adversity so that you can get back into the game quicker. To an optimist, it’s all about resilience and maximizing your results.

Effective salespeople concentrate on and master the art of bouncing back from disappointments, sharpening focus and delivery, and then returning to action as quickly as possible. Effective sales professionals win *and* lose more sales—because they *stay* in the game.

## Truth #21: Master the ABCs of Optimistic Self-Talk—Adversity, Beliefs, and Consequences

How do you change the way you talk to yourself about adversity and setbacks? To Seligman, how we see adversity is the critical starting point: “It’s a matter of ABC: When we encounter A-ADVERSITY, we react by

“One of the great discoveries man makes, one of his great surprises, is to find he can do what he was afraid he couldn’t do. Most of the bars we beat against are our own. We put them there, and we can take them down.”

—Henry Ford

“Nothing splendid has ever been achieved except by those who dared believe that something inside them was superior to circumstances.”

—Bruce Barton

“Don’t spend your time on things you can’t control. Instead, spend your time thinking about what you can control.”

—Benjamin Selekman,  
Harvard Business School

thinking about it. Our thoughts rapidly congeal into B-BE-LIEFS. These beliefs may become so habitual we don’t even realize we have them unless we stop to focus on them. And they don’t just sit there idly; they have C-CONSE-

QUENCES. The beliefs are the direct causes of what we feel and what we do next. They can spell the difference between dejection and giving up, on the one hand, and well-being and constructive action on the other.” By understanding this connection between adversity, belief, and consequence, you can begin to master the ABCs that impact every day of your life.

*Adversity* can be almost anything frustrating or unpleasant that occurs in your personal or professional life: a flat tire, a public attack by your boss, a relationship breakup, an unexpected large bill, a layoff, or a drastic drop in your stock portfolio. Make this chapter personal and think about the adversities you’re facing right now. What about over the past year? Be specific.

*Beliefs* are how you interpret the adversity. Keep in mind that it’s important to separate thoughts from feelings. “I just blew my career,” “I’m too old to learn what I need to know,” “I’ll never find someone to love me again,” or “If the market doesn’t rebound, I won’t be able to afford to retire!” are all *beliefs*. A belief’s accuracy can be evaluated and tested over time. Your beliefs are changeable—and they have consequences.

*Consequences* are the feelings and actions that come as a result of your beliefs; for example, the beliefs just listed might cause you to feel depressed, anxious, angry, or frustrated. You’ll often feel more than one of these if the adversity affects many aspects of your life. You’ll also be likely to act in some way. You may withdraw from others, send out your resume, seek revenge, call your broker to complain, or even cry your share of tears.

Since the first step in applying the *optimism technique* is to understand what you’re currently saying to yourself about the adversities you are facing, let’s start there. After all, you can’t

effectively change your thoughts or reframe your perspective until you've isolated what it is you're saying to yourself that is creating a bigger problem. Use the following space or a piece of paper and write down an actual adversity or problem you are now encountering or continue to struggle with. Putting it in writing will help move your problem from the emotional part of your brain to the part that helps organize and quantify information. By the time you finish analyzing your specific beliefs, feelings, and actions, much of your emotional tension will have been released in the writing exercise.

Be as specific as possible in identifying your adversities, beliefs, feelings and actions:

**Adversity:**

**Beliefs:**

**Consequences:**

**Feelings:**

**Actions:**

## The Gift of Distraction and Taking Distance

You've put the problem on paper; now, it's time to take a break. As an optimist, you'll learn the gift that comes in distracting your attention

from useless rumination and the importance of taking some appropriate distance before tackling difficult challenges. After all, giving in to your nonproductive feelings and counterproductive actions is no way to alter your self-talk habits.

So before you undertake the challenge of changing how you look at adversity, it's wise to take some time off for another activity. Some people become so trapped in their thinking patterns that they actually employ a simple, physical distraction. Some snap a rubber

"Worry is the darkroom where negatives become glossy prints."

—Max Lucado

band around their wrists or say to themselves “stop” every time they start to ruminate ineffectively.

One way to start is to take the piece of paper with your identified problem, fold it, and place it in your pocket or purse. Take a walk, call a fun friend, read an engaging novel, shoot a few baskets, or listen to your favorite music. Participating in an alternative activity allows your mind some perspective and distance. Some problems are better handled after you use that break to calm your emotional and unproductive inner dialogue.

Taking distance doesn’t give you permission to duck the problem. On the contrary, it is designed to ensure that you are more likely to come at the problem with a fresh, constructive mind-set. In addition, by postponing worry for even 20 minutes, you’re exercising control over it—rather than letting it control you.

## Truth #22: Win the Argument with Your Negative Beliefs to Change Your Attitude and Your Actions

Business philosopher Jim Rohn put it well when he said, “You have to stand guard at the door of your mind.” Essentially, that means being ready to argue with some of your negative beliefs. If your critical thinking habits aren’t helping you get where you want to go, there’s no time like the present to take them on. Martin Seligman suggests four ways to make your self-arguments convincing: *evidence*, *alternatives*, *implications*, and *usefulness*. I’ll add a fifth—*faith*.

### Evidence—Only the Facts!

The most convincing way to confront a nonproductive belief is to show that it is *factually incorrect*. After all, optimists are not afraid of

“To ignore the facts does not change the facts.”

—Andy Rooney

the facts, even if they’re tough to handle. Facts are your friends—because only by knowing what you are facing can you

actively improve your odds of overcoming it. So don't allow yourself to settle for assumptions that have not been tested.

Optimists find a centering strength in playing detective. Though many readers are probably too young to have heard of *Dragnet's* Joe Friday, this early television character had one simple statement that defined his approach to solving every crime. When he'd take out his trusty notepad to take down information, he'd caution: "Just the facts, ma'am!"

Play your version of Joe Friday in looking at your own beliefs. A patient receiving test results from a biopsy who hears the word "cancer" may react immediately with a frightening belief—"My God, I'm going to die of cancer!" Doctors must not only treat the disease but also fight the inaccurate beliefs that can work against the patient's chances of recovery. Taking a diagnosis like this well doesn't mean silence or blind acceptance of fate.

"Optimists, far from protecting their fragile vision of the world, confront trouble head-on, while it is pessimists who bury their heads in the sand of denial. Optimists were more likely to acknowledge the seriousness of the disease, experienced less distress and took more active steps to cope with it. Pessimism was associated with denial and a giving up response."

—Charles Carver

Whether at that moment or at the next follow-up visit, the *optimist detective* is there with pen and paper in hand, armed with important questions to assess the difficulty of the challenge they face: At what stage did we catch the cancer? How aggressive is it? What is the survival rate? What treatments are best in light of my particular situation? After reading on reputable online sites about some experimental treatments, I want to know if I could be a candidate. What can I do to make it more likely that I will be one of the survivors?

Optimists are realists. An optimistic approach to something devastating—like a cancer diagnosis—does not mean that every patient will beat the disease. Randy Pausch was 47 years old when he died from pancreatic cancer. This inspiring Carnegie Mellon University computer science professor gave his last lecture in September 2007. After stunning the class by confiding, "I have about six

“I feel I had zero control over getting cancer, but I have 100 percent control over how I will respond to dealing with cancer. When life kicks you, let it kick you forward.”

—Coach Kay Yow

months to live,” he talked about his childhood dreams and what they had taught him about life. It’s been said that he was a dying man who taught the world how to live. He said of his struggle with terminal cancer: “Experience is what you get when you

didn’t get what you wanted. We can’t change the cards we are dealt, just the way we play them.” The wisdom, passion, and optimistic attitude that he displays in his *YouTube* video and subsequent book, *The Last Lecture*, have become enduring sources of inspiration.

While considering the importance of checking facts when it comes to adversity, remember not to blindly adopt disasters that the media attempts to send your way. Many of those whose job it is to dispense the news try to attract attention from viewers by highlighting the crisis of the week. Don’t for a moment assume that because the problem is worldwide that you are next. Your job is to be the optimism detective who looks at the facts, not the isolated examples that inflame panic. Separate the media portrayal of the problem from the actual data of incidence, and invest your worry time in what you can actually *do* something about.

Now, look at the adversity you have isolated. How can you check out the facts associated with the beliefs that are making it hard to deal constructively with the problems? What experts would a detective contact? What sources might give you meaningful information? Could an Internet search do the work for you?

“In the big picture, the world is safer than it has ever been. We’re living longer. Do what you can to turn the positive odds in your favor and then enjoy the journey. You only take it once!”

—Simon Briscoe, co-author of  
*Panicology*

In fact, the mere act of engaging in fact-checking can help you tremendously. You change your focus from ruminating and emotional paralysis to a more productive way of viewing the problem—one that may soon translate into more constructive feelings and actions.



## Alternatives—Seek Less Self-Destructive Explanations

Most events have multiple possible causes. Pessimists have a way of latching onto the worst possible explanations for events—the most permanent, pervasive, and personal ones that make bouncing back even more difficult. Optimists, on the other hand, ask: “Is there any less destructive way to look at this or explain what happened?” They expect to uncover causes that can be overcome and that will not necessarily happen again—those that are less permanent, less pervasive, and less personal.

*Optimists focus on what can be changed and resist saying “never.”* When I failed my first test for California licensure as a psychologist, I was confused. I thought I had done well on the exam and was tempted to say to myself, “If I felt I did my best and it still wasn’t good enough, I’ll never be able to pass that exam.” I struggled with my doubts but moved to action when I realized I would have a hard time improving on the next test unless I understood *why* I had failed. Playing detective, I contacted the medical examiners involved. They were sympathetic to my question and sent my inquiry to those involved in grading responses.

Although graders seldom provided feedback, they made an exception in my case. One of the reviewers called with this very valuable information: “As

“I’ve never lost a ball game,  
but I have run out of time on a  
few occasions.”

—Joe Namath

you remember, you had four essays. It was clear to all of us reviewing your exam that you knew the material, but it was also clear that you were in such a hurry that you failed to fully read one of the questions. You gave a wonderful answer to a question we didn’t ask. We could give you no credit on that essay.”

I therefore found that my reason for failing was changeable, not permanent. It wasn’t that I did not know the material; it was simply that I had failed to fully grasp a particular question that had been asked. The following year, I did a better job of fully reading the questions and passed with flying colors.

*Optimists look for those rare causes that sometimes make the difference between victory and defeat.* Although it was planned well and core samples indicated no problems, a construction project went way

over budget because unforeseen soil conditions required extra reinforcement. Your construction team may have a proven track record of success, but sometimes nature throws you a curve. Similarly, when a reporter asked a basketball team's all-star center why his offensive rebounds were down in the game, he replied with a smile, "When the other team makes 72 percent of their shots, there aren't a lot of rebounds for *anyone* to get. It's just one of those games you feel like applauding with their fans. They deserved this one." His optimistic thinking is one of the reasons he's a repeat all-star.

*Optimists are ready to accept nonpersonal causes that can explain a disappointing result.* It is important to accept responsibility when it is appropriate. But instead of always assuming that something is your fault, be ready to entertain a more favorable explanation. For example, after receiving his first territory, a sales representative was eager to make inroads on some new accounts to impress his boss. After being encouraged to send a proposal to a potentially big customer, he told his boss that he anticipated an order later in the week.

The new rep was disappointed and frustrated when the purchaser called and said that they had decided to go with a different vendor. He thought he had handled the call well and deserved the business; he was quick to talk to his boss about the decision. His boss said with a knowing smile, "He does that with every new rep. His brother-in-law is the other vendor. He just uses your proposal to show his boss that he's open to a competitive bid. As long as he's married, he isn't giving us the business. Don't take every sale personally. It's often not your fault."

That's good advice in facing *any* adversity. Are there any less self-destructive causes involved in the difficulties you're confronting? Does this outlook give you hope for possible future success by eliminating those causes? Always look for alternatives that help you bounce back.

## Implications—Realistic Likely Consequences

Don't make any disaster or misfortune worse than it is. Instead of assuming *the worst consequences*, take a realistic look at *the most likely consequences* to your setback.

Former football coach Don Shula had years of experience behind him when he told his young players, “Keep your perspective. Success is not forever, and failure isn’t fatal.” That’s not just good advice for football, but in the game of life as well.

Keep looking for ways to turn your experiences into maturity instead of using them as reasons to give up. It’s upsetting when all the old clichés turn out to make too much sense to deny:

- “It’s always darkest before the dawn.”
- “When life gives you lemons, make lemonade!”
- “This too shall pass.”
- “Don’t sweat the small stuff. Life and death are big stuff. Everything else is small stuff.”

Don’t discount clichés simply because they are clichés; after all, they’ve been around this long because they carry and anchor truths worth remembering.

Before starting his concert, great violinist Itzhak Perlman had moved his polio-crippled body across the stage. He had put down his crutches and picked up his violin. When he began to play, one of the violin strings snapped. He didn’t panic, or painstakingly leave the stage to secure a new string; instead, he began to play. Rather than giving in to the belief that it was impossible to play this symphonic work with only three strings, he played with such passion, power, and purity that the audience broke into a standing ovation. He bowed and said to the audience, “Sometimes it is the artist’s task to find out how much music you can still make with what you have left.”

If the result is not terminal, you’ve still got a game to play. After all, not getting what you want is sometimes a wonderful stroke of luck that frees you to

discover something even better. Losing a job is seldom the end of your career unless you let it be. Look back at career moves that were difficult at the time but gave you new opportunities that you now appreciate.

“Living with uncertainty is extremely damaging to your health.”

—Sarah Bulgard

“If at first you don’t succeed, try again. Then quit. There’s no use being a damn fool about it.”

—W. C. Fields

By helping others keep perspective, you control your own more consistently. One manager learned to help his team frame every so-called disaster with this question: “In

five years, will this matter?” The answer was seldom yes. What are the likely consequences you will face from your current setback? Be realistic, and you’ll soon be bouncing back.

## Usefulness—Will Worry Work?

Worry can exact a price that is sometimes worse than adversity itself. Research has shown that merely *worrying* about an event can be more detrimental to one’s health than actually *enduring* the event itself. In fact, two University of Michigan studies followed more than 3,000 employed participants for more than two years. Those who were chronically insecure about losing their jobs reported worse overall health and were more depressed than those who actually *lost* their jobs. Persistent worry takes its toll on your health *and* attitude.

If your negative belief is still stubbornly resisting all efforts to minimize its significance and impact, you might need to ask a very practical question: Will wasting any more time mulling over this situation produce any long-term value? Will prolonged problem solving get you closer to where you ultimately want to go? If not, it’s time to be practical. It’s time to let it go. Sometimes your goals have

changed, and overcoming the problem isn’t even relevant anymore. In short, some problems and disasters are worth leaving in the rearview mirror and moving on.

One of my clients had a great sense of humor and a unique way of getting closure

“It’s all about finding the balance between productive and unproductive worrying. Say to yourself, ‘Is this worry leading to a to-do-list?’ If it doesn’t lead to some action on your part today, set it aside.”

—Robert J. Leahy

on such experiences. After writing out his adversity and fully accepting that nothing could be done, he decided to cremate and bury it. He burned the piece of paper with his notes and then dug a small hole. He took a moment to thank the problem for teaching him some important lessons but confessed that it was time to let it go. He deposited the ashes and then covered them with dirt. As he started to leave, he turned around and said, as if talking to a dog, “Stay!” After that, every time he thought of those *dog days*, all he had to say was “I told you to stay!” and a smile would come to his lips. It simply wasn’t worth resurrecting.

Is it time to let go of your adversity? Discover your own creative way of getting this closure in a way that allows that to happen.

## Faith—Search for God’s Open Door

Any discussion on attitude and beliefs would be incomplete without addressing the role that faith plays in coping with adversity for so many people. Self-reliance is a powerful value

“I thank God for my  
handicaps, for, through them, I  
have found myself, my work,  
and my God.”

—Helen Keller

and an empowering strategy, but it has its limits. You may find support in a shared faith community and comfort by having faith in God’s providence. If you are a religious believer, “In God We Trust” may be more than a slogan on your money. Faith may be a centering belief in your life and may help you cope with life’s worst disasters and experiences.

Believers often live with tension that makes room for faith in God and doing their part to work out his will. You can pray to God and claim his providential destiny and still remain willing to be used by God in making a difference for yourself and others. As such, you can find in adversity an experience that brings further clarity to your purpose. Adversity can even open new doors to your calling.

The paradoxical advice most often attributed to St. Ignatius provides a powerful insight: “Pray as if everything depends on God.

“View each obstacle in life as a little gift. Open it and see what is inside.”

—Mother Teresa

Act as if it depends upon you.”

This statement highlights the importance of accepting God’s will while simultaneously working to live out that will. You do

what you can and trust that God will do the rest. Faith like this can lead to inner peace *and* constructive action.

During the 16 years that Scottish missionary David Livingstone spent in Africa, he faced one challenge after another. On nearly 30 occasions, he had been laid low by swamp fever. His left arm was crushed by a lion and hung helplessly at his side. Yet he was never deterred from his mission: “I return without misgiving and with great gladness. For would you like me to tell you what supported me through all the years of exile among people whose language I could not understand, and whose attitude towards me was always uncertain and often hostile? It was this: ‘*Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world!*’ On those words I staked everything, and they never failed!”

Hearing stories of such challenges tends to keep your own adversity in perspective. Faith—in any form—has the tendency to give those who believe constructive principles to hold on to in a difficult world. Use them—and anything else that gives you strength. Seek the support of your faith community; it can give a meaningful perspective to even your worst day. Look at the adversities you are facing—and consider how your faith can provide a fresh perspective that will guide you forward.

## Reframe Your Beliefs to Help You Overcome Adversity

“I’ve never been one who thought the good Lord should make my life easy; I’ve just asked Him to make me strong.”

—Eva Bowring

Now that you’ve effectively countered your nonconstructive beliefs, it’s time to shape some new statements that provide a healthier perspective for reframing the problems you’re

facing. Write these in a way that encourages you to make constructive actions you can embrace.

After repeated efforts to turn an employee around failed, one manager wrote down this destructive belief: “I have no leadership ability.” This assertion left him discouraged and reluctant to apply for an open middle-management position he had been encouraged to consider. However, he realized that his self-destructive belief was too sweeping of an indictment in light of his positive evaluation by both his boss and the rest of his team. After further conversations with human resources, he realized that many other managers had experienced similar problems with this same employee.

The manager wrote down a new statement to build a more positive focus: “I’m not the first manager to struggle with this associate. My leadership has been rated as effective by both my boss and my team. Although I do not control his performance, it is my job to do what I can to influence him. Instead of taking his performance personally, I will continue to work with human resources to appropriately counsel and hold him responsible. I’m also prepared to support his positive efforts to change when evident.” By affirming his own strengths and continuing to focus on how to deal with the problem effectively, the manager persisted. He began to make noticeable progress in eliciting the employee’s gifts in a way that made a difference for him and the team.

You may also find that constructive thinking can result in more positive feelings and purposeful actions. It’s time to craft your own statement. After you have reworked your belief and supportive comments, fold your reworked paper and put it in your pocket or purse. Read it daily for a week. If negative thinking patterns recur, pull it out and reread it. Changing how you think often takes repetition, but you’ll soon experience its optimistic benefit.

## **Truth #23: Experience Is What You Do with What Happens to You**

Undefeated by a blazing motorcycle accident—and a paralyzing private plane crash four years later—inspirational speaker W.

“It may be true that life is a grindstone, but it is equally true that whether it grinds us or polishes us is determined alone by the substance of which we are made. . . . That which has proved to be a stumbling block to one individual is a stepping stone to a more courageous soul.”

—Cavett Robert

Mitchell has gone on to live an amazing and productive life. He’s been a radio broadcaster, a town mayor, an author, and a celebrated professional speaker. The central theme of his message can be summarized in one statement: “It’s not what happens to you. It’s what you do about it.” Optimists around the world keep proving the truth in that statement.

In 1986, following the tragic Space Shuttle *Challenger* disaster, President Ronald Reagan acknowledged the terrible loss by saying, “Today is a day for mourning and remembering. We know we share this pain with all of the people of our country.” He went on to provide a perspective that helped reframe the loss and point to the country’s need to move forward: “The future doesn’t belong to the fainthearted; it belongs to the brave. The *Challenger* crew was pulling us into the future, and we’ll continue to follow them. . . . Nothing ends here; our hopes and our journeys continue.”

Disasters are not just disasters; they often become the catalyst for the development of significant solutions that pay heavy dividends for years to come. When presenting to a 101 Leaders Institute Summit, speaker and author Jim Cathcart observed that the world faced the Y2K challenge—and the possible computer dysfunctions that threatened to cripple the global economy—with a sense of determination. No one was in charge, yet somehow the world came together to take care of this potential disaster in time. We met the problem, built new competencies, and implemented computer redundancies and backup systems. Then

“Every crisis builds confidence and competencies for what comes next.”

—Jim Cathcart

we all held our breath on New Year’s Eve as we watched at the stroke of midnight in Australia to make sure that the lights stayed on!



It was in fact the Y2K challenge that helped create the computer backups that saved the U.S. financial system from total disaster on 9/11. The Twin Towers experience then helped launch Homeland Security, which in turn dealt with future relief efforts. The overwhelming demands that Hurricane Katrina created encouraged the development of new processes for the next disaster. History is nothing more than a compilation of human tragedies and victories earned. It's these experiences that continue to shape human experience and expand human knowledge.

Whether it is the world's economy or your personal corporate journey, optimism fuels progress. Author and speaker Francis Maguire saw his corporate journey as a series of obstacles that became amazing opportunities. He loves to say, "Every time you get hit in the face with an obstacle, look for the gift." As part of Federal Express's leadership team in the early years, Frank shared how an obstacle proved

"Read stories of courage. They make you wonder how you would have done compared with the hero of the tale, and you get very humble. You start self-querying and fantasizing about your own response, your own reaction. As the psalmist says, 'You become what you behold.' That's why stories of courage take you over. They are such cries of the heart."

—William Ian Miller

to be the need that birthed a company. When the Federal Reserve Bank learned that they needed to get checks to their facilities on the next business day, a small group of entrepreneurs approached the venture capitalists. Two weeks later, they had the money they needed to become the aspirin to the Federal Reserve Bank's headache. They called the new company Federal Express because their mission was getting business checks to the Federal Reserve Bank next day—guaranteed. During their first night in business, FedEx had only 16 packages.

Early efforts to market their services weren't working until a customer at a focus group meeting discovered the key to marketing their struggling brand. Federal Express had tried to sell America on a new kind of airline, but the customer told them the truth they hadn't

“Optimistic people generally feel that good things will last a long time and will have a beneficial effect on everything they do. And they think that bad things are isolated: They won’t last long and won’t affect other parts of life.”

—Martin Seligman, PhD

seen: “I don’t need another airline. I want my packages delivered absolutely, positively overnight every time.”

FedEx became a logistics company that helped organizations accomplish what they needed done faster . . . “absolutely, positively overnight every time!” People love

anyone who helps them vault over their obstacles.

So, what are *you* doing to look for the gift in your challenge?

## Look for the Gifts in Your Adversity

Your own personal history of overcoming obstacles and taking advantage of the lessons learned is one short chapter in a continuing human story. Nurture your life’s story with pride. As an optimist, you, too, can persevere in reframing difficulties and obstacles into new opportunities by taking advantage of Norman Vincent Peale’s advice: “Become a possibilitarian. No matter how dark things seem to be or actually are, raise your sights and see possibilities—always see them, for they’re always there.”

Don’t run from hardships; face them! Cultivate positive beliefs and thoughts about what you are capable of doing. Nurture an expectation of success in overcoming what life throws in your path—through good thinking and applied effort. Even in the tough times, look for silver linings.

“Life is not about waiting for the storms to pass . . . it’s about learning to dance in the rain.”

—Vivian Greene

The harder the challenge, the stronger your character can become and the greater your satisfaction will be when you continue to build on your track record of

success. By learning to think like an optimist, tough times can become opportunities to reinvent a business, retool your skills, rekindle relationships, find undervalued investment opportunities—and even renew your faith. Albert Einstein put it well: “In the middle of difficulty lies opportunity.” May it be so for you!

# Optimists Give Thanks for Gratitude

*“There is a secret to happiness and it is gratitude. All happy people are grateful, and ungrateful people cannot be happy. We tend to think that it is being unhappy that leads people to complain, but it is truer to say that it is complaining that leads to people becoming unhappy. Become grateful and you will become a much happier person. I try to be happy unless something happens that makes me unhappy, rather than unhappy unless something makes me happy.”*

—Dennis Prager, *Happiness Is a Serious Problem*

**T**he great game of life presents us with our fair share of both adversity and good fortune. You have bad accidents and happy accidents—things happen to you that you do not and cannot control. In the last chapter, we focused on how optimism can transform the ways in which you handle adversity. In this chapter, we’ll discuss how you can enhance a positive outlook by simply becoming more thankful.

We live much of our lives on autopilot. While adversity often gets our attention, the many daily blessings and gifts we experience go by without notice. We seldom take time to even consider the electricity that powers homes and businesses, but when the power is out, we're quickly reminded of how important it is to our lives. Whether it is love or lights, it is absence that makes the heart grow fonder.

"We need some thanks right now for all the things money can't buy. . . . I'm talking about our kids and grandkids, parents and grandparents, health, faith, a beautiful sunset that doesn't cost a dime and a full life that doesn't depend on the size of your savings account."

—Dennis McCarthy

In short, it's easy to complain about the difficulties and adversity that we face, but far too few of us learn the importance of giving thanks for the many happy accidents and blessings that we experience daily, on and off the job. Those who do are more optimistic and happy.

Roman orator and politician Cicero said centuries ago: "Gratitude is not only the greatest of all virtues, but the parent of all the others." Whether it comes as a result of our faith traditions or simply commonsense life experience—optimists learn to appreciate the power and the healthy perspective that an awareness of our many blessings can provide.

Holocaust survivor and *Man's Search for Meaning* author Viktor Frankl realized the power of reflecting on one's blessings in the midst of his Holocaust experience. During a predawn march to work on laying railroad tracks, another prisoner wondered out loud about the fate of their wives. The young doctor began to think about his own wife and realized that simply by thinking

"In the hospital in 'Nam, I learned something. Real miracles have to do with your perceptions being made finer. They don't have to do with God coming down in a lightning bolt or guys like me walking again. What they have to do with is how you perceive the ordinary things around you."

—Anonymous partially paralyzed Vietnam veteran

“When we choose not to focus on what is missing from our lives but are grateful for the abundance that’s present . . . we experience heaven on earth.”

—Sarah Breathnach

of her in this way, she was present within him. Frankl later wrote: “The salvation of man is through love and in love. I understood how a man who has nothing left in this world still may know bliss, be it only for a brief moment, in

the contemplation of his beloved.”

But how do gratitude and a sense of thanksgiving help sustain a positive, optimistic attitude? As we’ve already discussed, life is difficult, with adversity and disappointments built in. Expecting that everything will go well is not healthy; in fact, unrealistic expectations are a sure road to unhappiness and disappointment. But failing to appreciate the best in life is equally unhealthy.

## Avoid Pits People and the Complain Game

It used to be when you asked a person, “How are you doing?” They’d most likely reply, “Great!” However, with today’s growing cultural preoccupation with feelings and self-disclosure, complaining is far more accepted. Together with years of programming by a media focused on bringing you the worst up-to-the-minute disasters, problems, and crimes, it’s hard not to internalize that same negative scanning. Most news sources today take advantage of that very preoccupation. Members of the media are more than happy to have you use your cell phone or camera to capture crisis video to headline their evening news, which only feeds our own negative addiction.

Do you know any *Pits People*? Those are the people with whom every conversation involves some kind of complaining. They simply

“Ingratitude is always a form of weakness. I have never known a man of real ability to be ungrateful.”

—Goethe

cannot see the positive aspect of anything—their personal lives, their professional lives, or society overall. “The economy is the pits; this company is the pits. In fact, you’re the

pits!” After 30 minutes with a Pits Person, everyone’s morale is sagging.

So don’t get stuck playing the Complain Game; you simply cannot do that and expect to be more optimistic. Start some new habits. Try responding in a more thankful or upbeat way during daily conversations. People will ask you, “How’s it going?” Simply answer, “I’m just blessed out!” After returning from Vietnam, POW survivor and speaker Capt. Charles Plumb’s standard reply became an enthusiastic “I’m living the dream!” Spread a few smiles and watch attitudes lift. Even if it doesn’t help the outlook of others, it will certainly improve yours! When you begin to look for reasons to celebrate your day, you’ll find that there are plenty.

What can you do about the *Pits People* in your world? They control their comments and their attitude, but sometimes a gentle and respectful comment shared privately can make a difference. Some negative comments are necessary in business and in life, because hidden problems can become big problems. Let these negative people know that your goal is not to eliminate appropriate criticism; you’d just like them to consider adjusting their doses. After all, constant complaining isn’t welcomed on or off the job. Request that they try interjecting a few more compliments about what’s working well, so that others know they are part of the team. We listen to people who can tell the truth about what’s working and what isn’t.

“Our goal is to hold a 48-hour marathon of good news. This is our Christmas gift to show that Colombia can send a positive message.”

—Carlos Santa

People and cultures can change, and even the media can occasionally help with this. For example, Reuters reported that Radio Deportes de Caracol—a Colombian radio station in the northwestern city of Medellín—had given a positive gift to an area famous as the center of the country’s cocaine trade. The station dedicated itself to delivering two days of nonstop Christmas glad tidings in an effort to show that there is more to Colombia than bad news about war, violence, and drugs. In an effort to win a place in the *Guinness Book of Records*, some 15 journalists read more than 3,500

dispatches highlighting positive sports news, good corporate results, and other upbeat stories. The feedback from listeners was so positive that the station created a daily good news hour.

You don't have to have your own radio station to make a difference. Try talking about good news in the hallways of your organization, and think about what you would highlight in your own *good news* hour.

## Truth #24: Turn Happy Accidents into Tomorrow's Innovations

"Smart? It's not about being smart. It's about being able to recognize when you do something accidentally that in hindsight looks smart."

—Nick Reed, Paragon  
Biomedical CEO

Sometimes the best innovations are simply a consequence of happy accidents. In fact, the economic hall of fame is full of companies that in searching for an improved product were blindsided by an unexpected opportunity they almost missed.

Creator of the 3M fabric protector Scotchguard Patsy Sherman was the sixth woman inducted into the national Inventors Hall of Fame. Although initially hired as a temporary employee, her discovery had a way of extending that job for another 40 years. Her journey of discovery is proof that appreciating happy accidents is at the core of innovation. Sherman asserts: "Anybody can be an inventor. It has absolutely nothing to do with how much education or how many degrees you have after your name. It's a mind-set. When an inventor sees something unusual or something that is a disappointing result, they don't just throw it out and start over. They say, 'Hey, what happened here? Why did it happen? What does it mean? What might it be good for?'"

Many of the world's greatest discoveries—such as penicillin and the vulcanization of rubber—came about strictly by accident. However, somebody was keeping their eyes open and their brain in gear. These inventors gratefully rode their accidents into history on a course that still has an impact today.



The path to success does not necessarily follow a straight line. It's like a winding river, and like water, it eventually finds its course. Being smart means developing the mental flexibility and the eye to recognize and seize opportunities that appear in the flow. The best innovators are always looking for new gems within the open cracks in seemingly dead ends. They like dabbling in what-if games with life, and they seldom follow the shortest paths. Instead, they take time for excursions into tangents and activities that others just race by.

You most likely loved the process of discovery as a child. Maybe it is time to reclaim some of the joy so that you, too, can take advantage of the happy accidents that happen on your journey. Keep your eyes open and your brain in gear; be grateful for the gems you find.

## **Truth #25: Hope for More, but Never Be Thrown by Less**

As an optimist, you can hope for more out of life, but don't be thrown when you receive less. Don't expect things to automatically go well; instead, be pleased and thankful when

"Joy is what happens to us when we allow ourselves to recognize how good things really are."

—Marianne Williamson

they do. Just as your optimism has grown from a track record of overcoming the obstacles you've faced, your positive attitude matures when you can acknowledge and appreciate the experiences, people, and things that you value most.

As Dr. Joyce Brothers suggests: "Count up every single thing—large and small—that makes your life worthwhile, including your own innate talents. . . . When you quantify these things, gratitude—the mighty river to happiness—begins its journey through your soul." Now, that is a powerful picture of the kinds of things that genuine gratitude can produce! Remaining appreciative will keep your frustrations and setbacks in perspective. By taking the time to collect joy, you will learn that stressful worry and grateful thoughts are incompatible.

“My office is in the unit where the babies and mommies are brought together for the first time. Every day, I walk by the newborn nursery and see families gathered around smiling and happy. They’re not thinking about what’s going on in the world. They’re thinking about that brand-new baby.”

—Kathleen Alfe, Northridge Hospital Medical Center

So, instead of just focusing on the biggest hurdles on your to-do-list, start your day by taking a few minutes to actually count your blessings. What are you most thankful for today? Be specific, and try listing at least five things.

Two teens built a thriving business selling T-shirts with the positive message “Life is good!” They’ve had trouble keeping the T-shirts in stock.

The media may make a living bringing you the worst, but the people making things happen in the world don’t have time to watch. They’re too busy inventing a future they want to live in and enjoying every step of the journey.

## Live Simply and Focus on What You Have

Demanding more and more possessions and money in order to become happy seldom has the effect of actually creating the happiness you desire. Far too many people spend years gathering more things to fit into increasingly bigger houses, only to spend their later years getting rid of things and craving simplicity and satisfying relationships. Why wait? Claim a little more simplicity now; avoid the wasted cost and

“The real beginning of being happy is having gratitude. That’s where I live. I’m just grateful for what I have. I’m not vying for other things. I don’t need to do this. I don’t need to have that. I think it is the way I was raised.”

—Cameron Diaz

stressful aggravation involved in competing for who can own the most toys and the biggest mansion.

Writing commentary from Kentucky in the early years of our country, Francis Johnson wrote: “If we fasten our attention on what we have, rather than on what we lack, a very

little wealth is sufficient.” You’d certainly rather be rich than poor, but riches won’t always bring an optimistic attitude or satisfaction with your position in life. The rich still worry—their concerns simply involve more expensive toys.

When our son traveled with other teenagers on his first service mission to Mexico, he came home with a surprising observation. He had expected before he left that he would find children living in poverty to be unhappy. But as he watched these young people entertain themselves with makeshift toys and watched teens play on dirt fields, he saw more smiles, joy, and laughter than he did with teens from home. Just as he observed, your attitude can overcome almost any circumstance in order to find all the joy that is needed. Simple pleasures are seldom expensive, and appreciating them costs you nothing. In fact, this book has an entire chapter on developing simple activities that can break the momentum of a bad day and reset your attitude to positive.

## **Truth #26: Rejoice in the Gift of Every Day**

Maybe there’s a reason that so many different faiths encourage a spirit of gratefulness. Giving thanks to God is, for example, very much a part of the Jewish faith. The Mizmor L’todah, a psalm of thanksgiving (Psalm 100), was originally sung as believers brought their thanksgiving offering to the Jerusalem

Temple. Since then, it’s been incorporated into the introductory praises leading up to the main part of morning prayers.

Why do they start the day this way? Because every day—without even realizing it—each of us benefits from countless miracles. The believer’s mission in this world is to see the blessings, divine acts of kindness, and miracles that surround them and to respond by serving with gladness. Jewish believers therefore pray not just to give thanks

“When you arise in the morning, give thanks for the light and for your life, for your strength. Give thanks for your food and for the joy of living. If you see no reason for giving thanks, the fault lies only in yourself.”

—Tecumseh

“O Lord, who lends me life,  
lend me a heart replete with  
thankfulness.”

—William Shakespeare

to the Holy One, but as a reminder of the necessity to serve with joy. That means daily miracles from God above and daily service from believers below.

That same spirit of thanksgiving is evident in the Christian faith. The Apostle Paul, writing to Christians in Philippi, wrote: “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds.”

I’ve developed a habit that centers me on a path of gratitude. Before I start my 30 minutes on the cross-trainer equipment, I consciously repeat the sentiments expressed in Psalm 118:24—“This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it.” While I exercise, I focus on the many things that I am grateful for. You may want to try the same thing as you exercise!

Faith may not be the answer for everyone, but hope and optimism seldom exist in a vacuum. Many find them by being part of and in serving within a community. Successful actor Michael J. Fox tells the powerful story about his journey living with Parkinson’s disease in a book that he called *Always Looking Up*. Fox has learned to accept what fate has brought him, but that has not eliminated his choices or his commitment to remain optimistic. During an interview on an ABC special about his illness, Michael shared what his particular situation had taught him about life: “The answer had very little to do with protection and everything to do with perspective. The only unavailable choice was whether or not to have Parkinson’s. Everything else was up to me. I could concentrate on the loss or just get on with life and

maybe see if the holes started filling in for themselves.”

Even without faith, gratitude impacts the one who gives thanks and those who are thanked.

“Most people are as happy as  
they make up their minds to  
be.”

—Abraham Lincoln

Michael J. Fox is bringing his optimism and hope to communities and readers throughout the world. He may not address his gratitude to God, but he certainly is still making a difference. And you can do the same yourself.

“Since I am not sure of the address to send my gratitude, I put it out there with everything I do.”

—Michael J. Fox

## **Truth #27: Be Grateful for the People Who Make the Ride Worthwhile**

If you’ve ever lost—or came close to losing—someone you love, you know what matters most. You’ve had the opportunity to realize that it’s your loved ones, not your luxuries that truly count. Are you taking time to let others know how much you appreciate them? Don’t wait for going-away parties or memorial eulogies to express your gratitude.

June Solberg, who later with her husband, Dick, was sent to Germany to assist with post–World War II recovery, often told the story of a turning point in her life. During difficult economic times as a young couple, June and her husband struggled to make ends meet and provide for their two very young children. Walking back to her apartment on a cold winter evening, she clasped her two children on each arm. While wondering where the next dollar would come from, she was met on the snow-covered sidewalk by a smiling stranger. He paused for a moment, knelt down to look at her two children, and said, “Oh my, but you are rich.”

Solberg thanked the stranger for his kind words

“I used to ask my students, ‘How many of you have sent a handwritten thank-you note in the last year?’ Less than 10 percent could say they had. Gratitude is everything. Somebody once asked me if cancer had changed my views on life, and I said, ‘Not really. I’ve always believed every day is a gift, but now I’m looking for where to send the thank-you note.’”

—Randy Pausch

“What amazing gifts the new year brings! An entire year’s worth of wonderful opportunities, given to us one sunrise at a time. Many of the moments ahead will be marvelously disguised as ordinary days, but each one of us has the chance to make something extraordinary out of them. Each new day is a blank page in the diary of your life. The secret of success is in turning that diary into the best story you possibly can.”

—Douglas Pagels

and walked the rest of the way home with tears running down her face. She recognized that she was indeed rich in what mattered most—her husband’s love, her faith, and her treasured children.

If you are rich in relationships, as Solberg was, express your appreciation often. Developing your sense of gratitude won’t just help you and your attitude; it will allow you to reinforce the power of community and acknowledge the importance of others. Expressing gratitude is all about stopping

the flow and letting people know how much you value them and what they have done.

A few months before his father’s death, John Craig visited him at his law office in Wabash Valley, Indiana. While waiting for his father to finish with a client, John was called into the office. The client was a man known to the family for years—a prosperous, immigrant dairyman. Though John was aware that his father had handled a large and costly legal transaction for this man, he wasn’t sure why he was brought into the conversation.

His father pointed at his son John and spoke firmly, “That is the reason!” His father turned back to his client and continued, “My friend, when that man (nodding toward his son) was a baby during the height of the depression, you delivered a bottle of milk to my door every morning. I couldn’t pay for it. You never asked. No, my dear friend, there will be no fee owed to me in this case. That debt was retired years ago.”

Can you imagine the impact of that message on all involved? Who do you need to thank on and off the job? Put it on your to-do-list now!

## Handling What Comes Your Way and Making Things Go Your Way

You can increase your chances of happiness and optimism by choosing to be thankful. Count your blessings more than your problems. Instead of dwelling on what ought to be, look for the happy accidents that have provided blessings you couldn't have expected. As Albert Einstein so wisely observed, "There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as if everything is."

You've learned that optimism is all about handling what comes your way, but it's also about actively doing your part to make things go your way. So, as we turn to focus on how you manage yourself and your actions, you can be thankful for the exciting adventure that lies ahead as you work to invent a better future—one day at a time.

"Gratitude unlocks the fullness of life. It turns what we have into enough, and more. It turns denial into acceptance, chaos into order, and confusion into clarity. I can turn a meal into a feast, a house into a home, and a stranger into a friend. Gratitude makes sense of our past, brings peace for today, and creates a vision for tomorrow."

—Melody Beattie

# Optimists Provide Constructive Self-Criticism

*“The only man who never made a mistake is the man who never does anything.”*

—Theodore Roosevelt

**N**ot only can you expect to experience your share of adversity and good fortune in your life, but also you will most certainly earn your share of both successes and failures. We all make mistakes; that is a given. But optimists learn to

“A life spent in making mistakes is not only more honorable but more useful than a life spent doing nothing.”

—George Bernard Shaw

turn those mistakes into learning opportunities that point the way to eventual success. So, how do optimists handle the mistakes that are a natural part of every person’s life?



## Truth #28: The More Mistakes You Make, the Quicker You Learn

Children live on a steady diet of mistakes. You can't learn to walk without falling down or to speak without mispronouncing and misusing words. It's not possible to build a learning culture if people are afraid of making a mistake; they'll go into hiding instead of learning.

Those people born before the era of frequent PC use can vividly recall the first time they touched a computer. They didn't want people to watch as they tentatively typed on the keys. They were somewhat frightened, even worried, that if they touched the wrong key, Burbank might disappear! Younger generations, however, seem to have no such fear; they are experimenting, rebooting, experimenting again—taking learning to the edge and back again. By failing, they learn faster.

Fear of failure is something that we tend to learn in school; we become hesitant to raise our hands and give a wrong or stupid answer. The fear of success often hits later in life after years of achievement. The higher you go in the organization, the further you have to fall and the more people you take with you. In both cases, anxiety about making a mistake is a significant problem in a world where we face constant change. Progress today is regularly the result of rapid, often chaotic, change and the myriad of risk takers and innovators who make it happen. Too many Americans get an F where it counts the most: They fail to fail.

“If I had known what I know now, I would have made the same mistakes sooner.”  
—Robert Half

That's precisely why business consultant Michael Gelb wrote in *Training* magazine: “I think organizations should change the name of the training department to the ‘department of constructive mistake-making.’ If you're not making mistakes, you're not learning anything valuable.” Leaders' willingness to be transparent about their own failures and mistakes can go a long way toward creating a culture that capitalizes on failures instead of hiding them. No leader can know it

“A vital ingredient of success is occasional failure. Decision making is a prime responsibility of those in top positions, and their batting average between right ones and wrong ones must be high. . . . Apparently it is not a long leap from being right most of the time to the assumption that one is right all the time. . . . A big shot who has never laid an egg—in his opinion—is in the position of a hen under a similar handicap, about to be made a meal of.”

—Malcolm S. Forbes

all. That’s why you have people on your team who know more than you do, and it’s why you are wise to listen to them. Admitting failures makes you approachable to your biggest asset—your people.

Start by affirming the value of mistakes in setting the stage for success. Striving to produce failure-proof performance is often done at the expense of necessary progress. Business consultant and author Tom Peters reminds us: “Mistakes are not the spice of life. Mistakes are life. Failure is the only precursor of success.” Playing to win in the great game of business is guaranteed to produce

many fouls and missed goals. It’s one of the prices you pay for competing; it’s the same with all facets of your life. The more missteps you make as a parent, a salesperson, a manager, or a partner—the quicker you learn.

*BusinessWeek Online* contributor Ira Sager writes about what sets the Silicon Valley apart: “Failure is O.K. Push all levels of management to try new ideas. Let ideas incubate. Learn to live with creative chaos. Be your own toughest competitor. Don’t stick with your starters too long. Spread the wealth broadly. Grab market share at all cost. Stay at the cutting edge by investing in startups. In the end it comes down to an ill-defined, yet critical ingredient: culture. You have to change the way you do business. And remember the first item: Failure is O.K.”

Resilience and persistence consistently pay off. If you get out of the game because you make a mistake, you can’t win. As one soccer

coach drilled into his young players, “It’s not how many times you fall; it’s how quickly you get back up!” The way in

—Thomas J. Watson Sr.

which you talk to yourself when you make a mistake doesn't only impact your attitude and self-confidence; it can determine how quickly you rebound and get back in the game.

### **Your Worst Critic May Be Sitting in Your Seat**

Unfortunately, the way you privately evaluate yourself is most likely making matters even worse. As most people are, you are probably far more critical of your own behavior than you are of anyone else's. Such negative self-evaluations can affect your optimism and your performance on and off the job.

One way to view self-confidence is to see it as an inference you make from your own private self-evaluations. It's estimated that you assess some aspect of your performance between 300 to 400 times a day. You often break the flow of the day's activities—if only for a moment—to mentally evaluate your own performance.

Unfortunately, most of this self-analysis tends to be unfavorable. For the average person, 80 percent of internal dialogue regarding their own performance tends to be negative, and only 20 percent is positive. With that kind of critic on board all day long, you might be treated better if you spent time with your enemies!

We'll leave positive self-support for our next chapter; however, our tendency to major in self-criticism is too glaring to ignore. Do those numbers seem outrageous—80 percent negative? Do a little reality testing on yourself. How often do you appraise your own personal and professional actions as less than satisfactory? Would you accept that a good mistake is easily worth 45 minutes of self-whipping interspersed over a three-day period? You've

“No matter what our achievements might be, we think well of ourselves only in rare moments. We need people to bear witness against our inner judge, who keeps book on our shortcomings and transgressions. We need to convince us that we are not as bad as we think we are.”

—Eric Hoffer

“I am always with myself, and it is I who am my tormentor.”

—Leo Tolstoy

“Let’s face it. Everyone fails so much these days. You can’t let it intimidate you. What I tell people, and try to tell myself, is: The only way you truly fail in this day and age is to stop trying altogether.”

—Stephen Covey

heard yourself: “That was stupid. I can’t believe I said that. And they were all watching me. They’re probably talking about me right now over dinner!”

And as if that’s not bad enough, you have a very efficient filer in the back of your

brain. Every time you call yourself a name, he goes back to check the evidence. Can you hear him? “Just a minute, boss. Let me check your ‘stupid’ file. Why, yes, you are stupid. In fact, you’re getting worse. This reminds me of the time you. . . .”

Most of us are good at making ourselves feel worse—not better—about our mistakes and failures. But as an optimist, you can change that.

## Majoring in Self-Criticism Leaves You Needing the Support of Others

As research suggests, most of us are four times as negative as positive when speaking to ourselves. However, we are publicly more likely to present ourselves as being 95 percent effective and admit making an occasional mistake to appear human. There’s nothing wrong with putting your best foot forward. After all, you clean your house before you invite neighbors to come over, and you try to dress nicely for dates and job interviews. We all do the same with the image we try to convey to our customers and our colleagues. Thankfully, only you know the worst about yourself.

Unfortunately, when you compare what only you know about yourself with everyone else’s public image, you lose, badly. You may even fear that people will discover the truth about you and withhold their approval. After all, when you are preoccupied with your faults, you seek 80 percent support from others just to break even with your 80 percent self-criticism! You search for loved ones, associates, and

bosses who will affirm you and make up for your own self-esteem deficit.

Respected speech coach Ron Arden shared an insight from legendary actress Jessica Tandy, one that we all ought to appreciate: “Understandably, every human seeks some expression of approval. But, in our eagerness to please and be pleased with ourselves, we choose too often to hear the

applause rather than the suggestions for further improvement of our work or ourselves. Throughout my career, the following thought by Constantin Stanislavsky has served as a guide: ‘Young actors fear your admirers! Learn in time, from your first steps, to hear, understand and love the cruel truth about yourselves. Find out who can tell you the truth and talk of your art only with those who can tell you the truth.’”

Approving applause can often seem shallow, short-lived, and sometimes undeserved to an actor. It’s what the audience says as the people leave the theater that often contains the truth actors need to hear. You want and need to have discerning, independent people who are assertive enough to confront you when you need it. But when you require the approval of others, they control your confidence. By withholding that approval, they leave you feeling less effective and less confident. At a time when you want to be more active and assertive on and off the job, this need often leaves you more dependent instead.

There are days when no one will support you, no matter what your leading role—manager, actor, parent, or president. As a sales professional, there are days no one will even answer the phone, much less buy your product. Being dependent on the approval of employees, your children, or anyone else is no way to live life. To fight this need, start by judging yourself as you would others you care

“By recalling those inglorious, ineffective events of yesterday, our energy is sapped for facing the demands of today. Rehearsing those wrongs, now forgiven by grace, derails and demoralizes us. There are few joy stealers more insidious than past memories that haunt our minds. . . . Forget the past!”

—Charles Swindoll

about. When you do that well, you just may be able to listen to the criticism you need to hear from others.

## Truth #29: Love Yourself as You Do Your Loved Ones, Neighbors, and Colleagues

Religious principles challenge you to love your neighbor as yourself, but heaven help your neighbors if you talked to them as you talk to yourself. “You did what? You’re so stupid! Did anyone see you? They saw you! Do they know I know you? I mean it reminds me of the time you. . . . You’re getting worse!”

“The brilliant moves we occasionally make would not have been possible without prior dumb ones.”

—Stanley Goldstein

Who needs neighbors or colleagues like that! If you talk to an employee the way you talk to yourself, he could file a grievance and win. It’s time to find a new way to speak

to yourself about the mistakes and failures you have made. Start by treating yourself like you treat those you care about. Just as you would forgive them, forgive yourself and make room for your mistakes as valued learning opportunities that help you grow.

As Confucius said, “Our greatest glory is not in never falling but in rising every time we fall.” Or as one particularly insightful manager put it to her team, “Mistakes are clear evidence that someone out there is trying to do something.”

Mistakes are always going to be made; your challenge is to figure out how to be self-critical without verbally abusing yourself. Start by looking at self-criticism as *course correction data* that helps you get back on track to achieve your goals. Every time you wander off course, this feedback allows you to refocus on your target. The purpose of feedback ought not to be self-conviction or blaming; rather, it should be to make you more effective tomorrow in reaching your goals.

You know the importance of forgiving others; it’s time to get better at forgiving yourself. Almost every mistake is part of a

learning process. They're seldom terminal and always essential for any lively, forward-looking organization. As former NBA basketball player and coach Pat Riley says, "There are no failures, just results. Now get busy doing what you can to make your results better." Now, that is good advice.

### Truth #30: When Self-Critical, Avoid General Labels and Focus on Specific Feedback

Instead of using general labels like *stupid* or *rude* to describe yourself, use specific, detailed descriptions. What exactly did you do that you feel you did not handle well? Remember, it's easier to admit that you made a mistake than to admit you are one. While you probably wouldn't describe yourself as a generally rude person, you've certainly had moments you aren't proud of. I've had my own share of those experiences on the freeways of Los Angeles. I know that my driving wasn't appreciated; the other driver didn't wave with all his fingers. Over the years, however, those instances have been far less frequent.

You can always learn important life lessons by looking in your rearview mirror, but continuing to stare at it is never wise. Crashing out the front window just makes your mistake a lot more expensive. Look back just long enough to

"Notice the difference between what happens when a man says to himself, 'I have failed three times,' and what happens when he says, 'I am a failure.'"

—S. I. Hayakawa

learn. Memorize this important question to help control your focus: What did you specifically do that contributed to the problem or failure? And don't beat yourself up over things you couldn't have controlled or didn't cause. Although you may not be pleased with the result, you'll be hard-pressed to identify anything you did that contributed to the failure. While you of course want to take responsibility for your errors, don't take responsibility you don't deserve. In some situations, you simply don't deserve criticism; you

deserve a pat on the back for your heroic efforts in the face of otherwise frustrating circumstances. And when you can't get a pat on the back any other way, then give yourself one!

There may, of course, be many situations in which you can clearly identify specific mistakes you made that contributed to the problem or poor results. But it's time to leave any verbal self-abuse or replays of similar past failures to the pessimists in our midst. Instead, opt to do what optimists do—a little problem solving out the front window.

### Truth #31: Claim Optimism by Making Your Future Work

When reporters asked former IBM CEO Lou Gerstner to look back at the most important decision he had made, he responded honestly and wisely: "I've been working so hard here and focusing on the future, I haven't had time to think about it. To contemplate . . . on the hills and valleys of history is not on my agenda. I want us to keep running, to keep moving ahead. Some may feel that because the wind is now at our back, it's time to coast. They are allowed a five-minute celebration; then it's time to get back to work." The moral? If you're going to reflect on past decisions—the good ones and the mistakes—don't take too long. There's too much to do in improving your situation today.

Professional golfing legend Tiger Woods is also known for his future-focused approach: "People want to compare my performance to the past, and I'm trying to get better in the future, not the past." Woods seems to win far more tournaments than he loses and is consistently close to taking the trophy almost every time he plays.

"A man should never be ashamed to admit that he has been in the wrong, which is but saying, in other words, that he is wiser today than he was yesterday."

—Jonathan Swift

Yet, with all the victories and great moments in his career, he continues to focus on improving. Even at the top of his game, Woods changed his swing and paid the price as he waited for it to produce results. Why? He knew it



would help him score even better in the future. Top performers don't bask in reliving the past; they keep raising their own bar! They don't want to settle for a good year; they want to sustain a dynasty year after year.

While you are unlikely to ever match Tiger's golf prowess, you can claim his future-focused attitude for your own life. Professionalism is not about coasting or resting on laurels; it's about lifelong learning and the pursuit of excellence. You earn it one day at a time, every day. A mistake is just a problem in need of a solution.

It's time to put this message together into a script you can use to give yourself constructive feedback. After identifying your own specific mistake, focus on the future by asking two important questions:

- What specifically can and will you do to rectify the problem?
- How would you handle the same situation next time?

First, take responsibility by asking what you specifically can and will do to rectify the problem. If any constructive action or apology could help fix the problem or heal a relationship—do it. If you didn't do the right thing for an ongoing relationship at the time, nothing should stop you from doing that now. Taking responsibility for your own errors is always the right thing to do.

"It's called 'attention to detail'! Some of the best lessons are when you get something wrong and learn from it."

—David Nelms, CEO of  
Discover Financial

There is a myth of spontaneity that implies that if you didn't handle a situation correctly at the time it occurred, there's no point in bringing it up again. But spontaneity is overrated. We've all watched too many movies where actors always say the right thing at the right moment. Why? They have a script!

Real life is different, of course, but when a conversation is not going well, wouldn't it be wonderful if you could say: "Cut! Let's take

this scene from the top . . . and this time let's adjust our lines!" We don't get to go back for retakes; we live life in real time with no dress rehearsals. We make mistakes both by being too spontaneous and by not saying anything at all. Take responsibility for both, and take the initiative to offer an apology when appropriate.

However, you don't want to take this personal responsibility to an extreme. After all, an apology is simply not practical in

"People want to hear apologies. Next, they want you to fix the problem, to clean up the mess or make sure it never happens again."

—Bill Benoit

some situations. If you inappropriately cut someone off on the freeway, it's not wise or a good use of time to go back to that place and wait for that driver to appear again so that you can say you're sorry. Some-

times you just have to let the past go and let what you've learned benefit others in the future.

There is an added benefit to being easy to reach when you've made a mistake. Being a problem solver rather than a problem evader is a sure way to build strong personal and professional relationships. When you take responsibility for your mistakes, you are more likely to have people join in when you celebrate your victories. As we've previously stated, hidden mistakes can become very big mistakes. What really makes mistakes expensive is failing to admit them right away. Unfortunately, too many business cultures discourage leaders and associates from admitting mistakes. Instead, they hide mistakes and play the blame game. Similarly, many parents feel that it undermines their authority to acknowledge to their children that they handled a situation poorly.

Don't let that happen in your organization or your family. Everyone would learn so much more from their mistakes if they weren't so busy denying that they made them or blaming others.

As one executive said to his leaders, "You have the right to make a mistake. You don't have the right to cover your ass over that mistake." By publicly modeling appropriate self-criticism, you can help build a culture where it is safe to surface errors quickly.

## Make It Safe to Surface Problems Quickly by Doing It Yourself First

We are entering an accountability age in which most people abhor leaders who say one thing and do another. In today's world, it is always right and prudent to take responsibility for errors and communicate problems as soon as possible. Don't wait for *20/20* or *60 Minutes* to come to your door to ask why you didn't act. The best leaders don't wait for crises to force action; they initiate action in pursuit of strategic and ethical change. Learn to take responsibility and apologize when appropriate, but even more important, solve problems instead of attempting to dodge them. One way to do so is to make sure that others feel safe and comfortable bringing up any problem. As one woman executive said, "They have to be able to tell me my baby is ugly—even when I don't want to see it!"

One particular CEO approached this in an interesting way by putting \$100 on the table with his top executives. He shared a costly mistake he had made and what he learned from the mistake. He then offered a challenge: \$100 for the one person who could top his mistake. Learning from mistakes became an important part of their corporate culture.

In Ann Arbor, Michigan, executives compete for the Golden Egg Award for the most notable errors made by company presidents. At Graphic Controls Corporation in Cherry Hill, New Jersey, the management invites others to tour their facility. They don't just showcase their benchmark

"We all make mistakes. But what really makes mistakes expensive is not admitting them right away. Business culture teaches us never to admit to our mistakes but to bury them instead or to blame someone else."

—Katie Delahaye Paine, CEO  
of KDPaine & Partners LLC

"As strange as it may sound, the work of execution is actually all about failure. So celebrate it! Bronze an oversized screw, and award it each week to the project-team who made the 'best screwup of the week.'"

—Tom Peters

achievements; they reveal some of the warts as well. They find that visitors can often provide new ideas they need to explore.

Are you making it safe to admit and confront problems in your organization? Don't force your people to wait until a problem spirals out of control. Learn to ask frequently, "Are you aware of any *red flags* we ought to be concerned about?" And if there are—listen!

## Don't Just Admit Your Mistakes—Learn from Them

Finally, and most important, don't just admit mistakes; learn from them as well. Former MarketWatch CEO Larry Kramer is now a senior advisor at Polaris Ventures, a life sciences venture capital firm. He has an interesting perspective on picking his team: "I like hiring people who have at least one failure on their resume. It's a character-building experience and a reminder of how things can be worse. It's kind of like people who have lived through a war and those who have not." Kramer realizes that times of disappointment and failure compel us to search for anchors to help us recover and carry on with renewed strength and resolve. True optimism is born of struggle, and Kramer likes to extract that struggle by asking, "Tell me about a disappointment or failure you have had that taught you an important lesson." Candor in the face of failure shows that people can benefit and learn from the past and that they have no illusions about whether problems that do occur can be overcome. Being open to learn from your errors helps prove this to yourself and others.

So learn from every mistake by asking yourself a centering question: How would you handle a similar situation next time? In fact, if you want to spend more time in constructive self-criticism, then this is where to invest it. Setting the stage for improving your performance in the future is always a worthy use of your time. If you struggle with being able to turn your internal comments into constructive problem solving, then try these two time-tested strategies. Use a valued colleague or friend as a sounding board to talk through your self-criticism.

If that is impractical—or there is no one available—write out your self-criticism. Writing can be quite a therapeutic process when

used to appropriately channel self-criticism into a problem-solving strategy. People used to have time for diaries and more conversations with friends. These days, we don't appear to have time for either. As a result, we spend more time in therapy with professionals whom we've sworn to confidentiality. This is often a good investment. You may feel better after a few sessions, but it may be less costly and perhaps as effective to first start making more time available for friends and writing in your journal.

So start now. Use this appropriate self-criticism script and begin writing.

**Appropriate Self-Criticism:**

**To understand your role, what did you specifically do that contributed to the problem or failure?**

**To take responsibility, what specifically can and will you do to rectify the problem?**

**To learn, how would you handle a similar situation next time?**

## **Mistakes Are Tough but Essential Teachers**

Using our mistakes to learn can be an incredibly tough process. Life often gives you a surprise quiz and a failing grade before you even get to learn the lesson. So when your mistakes cost you and your organization, make sure you don't double the price by losing the lesson. Being overly self-critical forces you to waste time hiding errors and seeking affirmations that could have been invested in inventing your future. Hopefully, this chapter has given you assurance that you are not alone. It's nice to know that we all make mistakes and have a tendency to major in self-criticism.

Thankfully, it doesn't need to remain that way. You can manage yourself the way you would want to be managed by others. Self-confidence doesn't

"The brick walls are not there to keep us out; the brick walls are there to give us a chance to show how badly we want something."

—Randy Pausch

come from an absence of self-criticism but from a realistic balance of learning from our errors and celebrating our victories.

Welcome to the challenge of turning your mistakes into stepping stones for future growth and success. Now, it's time to learn how to

“To look back all the time is boring. Excitement lies in tomorrow.”

—Natalie Makarova

major in support by catching yourself being effective. Sometimes you amaze even yourself. As an optimist, it's time you celebrate those moments!

# Managing Your Own Motivation Means Catching Yourself Being Effective

*“I wish I would have followed my instincts earlier in my career rather than looking for others’ approval. While it’s easy for people to be their greatest critics, it took me years to become my own best advocate.”*

—Ellen Langa Campbell, President of NouSoma  
Communications

**C**onstructive self-criticism is an important part of life, but so is self-support. Mistakes help you learn what not to do. Acknowledging your successes allows you to reinforce what’s already working.

So instead of repeatedly focusing on what’s going wrong, take the optimistic approach and concentrate more intently on your own positives. Take

“To be encouraged look at how far you have come. To be discouraged look at how far you have to go.”

—Mark Sanborn

“Calm self-confidence is as far from conceit as the desire to earn a decent living is remote from greed.”

—Channing Pollock

time every day to examine what you’ve done that has contributed to your achievements—both on and off the job. After all, a big part of maintaining a healthy, optimistic perspective

in challenging times is managing your own motivation. This requires that you *catch yourself being effective*. You’ve learned the importance of nurturing gratitude for the happy accidents that happen—those things that you don’t control but can and should appreciate. It is all the more important to appreciate what you do control—the actions that you initiate.

As we discussed in the last chapter, self-feedback research finds that our internal evaluations tend to be 80 percent negative and 20 percent positive. You may now have a better understanding of how you can focus your negative self-evaluations, but how can you do a better job of celebrating your triumphs?

## Needing the Support of Others Leaves You Dependent Instead of Confident

As much as you appreciate the support of others, you don’t want to completely depend on their approval in order to make decisions and take action. You want to enjoy the positive comments from an appreciative boss or loved one, not falter because of its absence.

In *The One Minute Manager*, author Ken Blanchard asserts that for managers to be perceived as supportive, they need a four-to-one positive to negative contact ratio—that’s four positive messages for every one criticism. That fits! When you make four

“They cannot take away our self-respect if we do not give it to them.”

—Gandhi

critical self-evaluations for every complimentary one, you need some positive feedback from an appreciative boss just to break even. Unfortunately,



few managers are that positive. Most compliments come at going-away parties or in eulogies when you die. And the same often occurs in your personal relationships. In fact, one of the few times in life you will receive 80 percent support is when you're initially dating a new person, because that's essentially the sales phase of your relationship. When you're just getting to know a new romantic partner, both parties tend to be on their best behavior.

After several years of marriage, however, those "I love you" comments and sweet nothings tend to decrease. As one golden oldie said of his wife, "I told her I loved her when we got married, and if I ever changed my mind, I'd let her know." It certainly would be wise for bosses and spouses to be a lot more appreciative, but it's not especially healthy to expect that kind of support.

Never let yourself rely that heavily on others' approval—no matter how much they profess to love or support you. While you, of course, may value and appreciate those comments, don't allow yourself to become emotionally dependent. Face an unsettling reality—you're stuck with you! Your motivation ultimately is your job. You're the only person who's with you 24/7, so it's time you learn to increase your frequency of appropriate self-support.

But don't worry. Help is on the way.

"It takes half your life before  
you discover life is a do-it-  
yourself project."  
—Napoleon Hill

## **Truth #32: When You Cannot Get a Compliment Any Other Way, Give Yourself One**

Mark Twain had some excellent advice: "An occasional compliment is necessary to keep up one's self-respect. . . . When you cannot get a compliment any other way, pay yourself one." Twain's words encourage us once again to treat ourselves as we treat people we care about. You shouldn't take yourself for granted any more than you would undervalue an associate, friend, or loved one. And while this is easy to state, very few people actually live it. To build a strong and realistic self-confidence,

“Rather than giving people an inflated view of themselves, we need to give them concrete reasons to feel good about themselves.”

—Martin Seligman, PhD

you must develop a habit of recognizing your own commendable actions on a daily basis. This isn't about feeding a big ego; it's about becoming aware of your strengths as well as your mistakes. You may be winning

and truly not know it—unless you're keeping score of your own effectiveness.

Unfortunately, it's far too easy to take yourself for granted. The reason is simply that you're around yourself all the time. In fact, if you find that you aren't, as a psychologist, I'd suggest that you need more than this book can provide. But in all seriousness, spending every waking moment with yourself comes with a cost—namely, the familiarity that causes you to miss so much of what you do. Your own skills and accomplishments are like the pictures you hang on the wall. You enjoy them for a time, but after two weeks of walking by them, you don't even see them anymore. They become part of your gray zone of unobserved treasures—those things you possess but no longer experience or appreciate. You see them when you move or when new guests point them out when they visit. That's actually why you have guests—they show you your home!

Don't hide your achievements in that gray zone of hidden treasures. Cultivate your confidence by scheduling time to appreciate yourself in your daily routine.

## What's Working for You?

When I was 17, my first and best manager—a man by the name of Jack Nichols—asked me a question that has impacted my confidence and my life ever since. Every week, this construction supervisor took a 15-minute walk with each of his eight employees. The question he asked on every one of those walks was as simple as it was unsettling: “What's working for you?”

Even when I was a teen, my supervisor expected to learn from me. I was surprised by his question on our first walk together. While I

had been privileged to learn from good parents and excellent teachers, none had ever asked me that question. I felt like responding, “Have you forgotten what it’s like to be a teenager? We don’t know anything. In fact, talk to my mother. She knows I don’t know anything and might give you an excuse note!”

Near the end of our first walk, Jack informed me that he was going to ask me that question every Friday. As a good student, I’d already learned to figure out how teachers construct tests and to use that to guide my study habits. If the teacher used the text, their lectures, or both, I’d focus my study for the test accordingly. My supervisor made it similarly clear—I was going to have a quiz every week, and he wasn’t giving me any of the answers. I had to come up with my own innovation every week. If nothing worked by Thursday, I had a mission—something has to work today, because he’s going to ask that stupid question tomorrow! And every Friday, I had an answer. Twice, the team even implemented my suggestions.

Jack Nichols helped nurture my confidence at a time I needed it most, and he didn’t do it by providing empty praise to a young teenager. He did it by asking a weekly question that forced me earn his respect. He expected me to make a difference, and I did.

Use Jack’s question to guide your own self-motivation strategy. And don’t just accidentally notice the ways in which you’re effective; use a calendar or journal to keep track of and record everything you do that works. One manager made a habit of ending his work day by sending an e-mail to himself to document his daily accomplishments. When it arrived, he would save each of them in an e-mail folder to review when he needed a lift or to use to document his effectiveness at his own evaluation.

Whatever way you catch yourself being effective, before ending your day, force yourself to identify and write down at least one thing you did that you handled well. Focus on what stood out in your own performance. Just being aware of the fact that you have to make this daily entry will compel you to make each day significant. Make your entries short and specific, but write them every day until it becomes a habit.

### Your Self-Support Strategy

What have you done today that has worked for you? Record every day a specific reference in your calendar, journal or e-mail to yourself.

There are many benefits to developing this habit. If you've ever struggled to think of specific examples of your own work or value, your documented entries will give you all the evidence you need. If you're having a bad day, nothing is more uplifting than scanning through some of your recent accomplishments.

### Self-Confidence Is Not Self-Delusion

"Act in ways that will cause you to respect yourself. Self-love is unconditional. Self-respect is something you earn yourself. Self-esteem will come later out of self-respect."

—Dennis Prager

Effective self-motivation is one thing, but appropriate confidence is not built on self-delusion. It seems nowadays that we're flooded with advice on how to overcome feelings of inferiority. But if you haven't noticed, everybody is less profi-

cient in some areas. Acknowledging one's natural limits is a healthful and realistic attitude. Success comes when you can accept your limitations and capitalize on your strengths. Nobody can be exceptional at everything—a simple fact that too many success mavens fail to acknowledge. In fact, very often, feelings of inadequacy eventually arise after hearing that we're good at everything—and then coming face-to-face with reality.

Psychologists Harold Stevenson and James Stigler tested the academic skills of elementary school students in the United States, China, Japan, and Taiwan. Although the Asian students outperformed the Americans, the U.S. students felt better about themselves and their work. They had somehow managed to combine high self-esteem with poor work—perhaps from the abundance of recognition for just showing up. The lesson we can learn from this is

that we must care enough to be honest in our self-evaluations. We have to earn our own respect by acknowledging what we truly do well.

Sustainable and realistic self-confidence will always be built on accurate assessments of yourself. It requires you to discover your strengths and develop them in a way that brings satisfaction and makes a difference. It's even better when someone is willing to reward you for the value you provide. When you're good at something that others want and/or need—and you love doing it—you're on your way to a satisfying life. Keep developing and acknowledging your greatest gifts, and you will be more optimistic.

“You can only become truly accomplished at something you love. Don't make money your goal. Instead, pursue the things you love doing, and then do them so well that people can't take their eyes off you.”

—Maya Angelou

## Humility Is Strength with Gentleness

You don't have to leave your faith out of your efforts to build a stronger self-confidence. One of the greatest acts of faith is to transfer God's love for you into a realistic faith in yourself. If you believe that you were created with gifts and a purpose to use those gifts, using them in a meaningful way—and becoming aware that you're doing so—allows you to reinforce your faith and to serve God.

A study by Rebecca Nolan of Louisiana State University at Shreveport found that the more religiously involved eighth graders were, the higher their self-esteem was. Spending time hearing about God's love may soften some of the self-critical doubts that come from constant peer comparison. After all, many of us are still just teenagers with older skin; faith can be helpful for self-affirmation at any age.

But, you might wonder, what about the importance of humility? *Humility* can be defined as “strength with

“Know your strength. The most important thing is to know what you're good at.”

—Peter Drucker

gentleness.” The truly humble know their strengths but go beyond that to affirm others’ gifts as well.

## Truth #33: Lead in a Way That Instills Confidence in Others

Former SAS CEO Jan Carlzon reminds us all of the importance of building others’ confidence: “People aren’t born with self-confidence. Even the most self-confident people can be broken. Self-confidence comes from success, experience, and the organization’s environment. The leader’s most important role is to instill confidence in people. They must dare to take risks and responsibility. You must back them up if they make mistakes.”

With empowerment comes responsibility. As a result, some

“The greatest good you can do for another is not just to share your riches, but to reveal to him his own.”

—Benjamin Disraeli

workers would rather stick to their job descriptions than take on new responsibilities that risk visible failure. Few want to be empowered if failure means being next in line for

losing one’s job. It is also true that leaders generally don’t empower workers they don’t trust.

The challenge is for workers to develop confidence while managers gain that needed trust. When that happens, workers want to be empowered, and managers want to empower them to do as much as they can.

To accomplish this with your team, set clear boundaries for authorized decision making and expand those boundaries as your worker’s self-assurance grows. Provide the resources and responsibility your people need to succeed, and take time to notice and acknowledge their effectiveness. By doing so, you’ll build their confidence and gain trust in their performance.

Make sure your people also know that the challenge of taking on new projects in unexplored territory can occasionally lead to wrong turns and dead ends. Even though they do the best they can, good results sometimes remain elusive. Encourage the heroic efforts they make in support of strategic change. If all you recognize are

successes, your employees will soon begin to limit their work to what they know will produce safe results. You'll soon hear a familiar reply: "It's not in my job description."

"Every person I work with knows something better than I. My job is to listen long enough to find it and use it."

—Jack Nichols

Affirming others doesn't threaten your own self-worth; it confirms it. Only those bosses, parents, and partners who are self-confident have the ego strength to watch others succeed. It's those who are not confident who must steal the credit to prop up their own inadequate self-worth.

Whether your confidence is strengthened by faith, appropriate self-support, or both, never forget to extend the gift of cultivating positive self-support to others with whom you interact, work, and live. As a leader, you may want to add a little positive reporting to your staff meetings, e-mail, and phone exchanges or your one-on-one walks. Join my first manager, Jack Nichols, in asking others: "What's working for you?" Don't just do it once, or they'll probably think that you're trying something you read in a book. Instead, make it a repetitive habit. Consistently asking that question will help others build a stronger sense of self-worth—and all will learn in the process.

When you're truly confident, you aren't threatened by others' admirable attributes; you're inspired by their strengths in action. After all, their success doesn't take away from yours. They just give you another reason to celebrate life and the gifts each person brings to the party!

## Care about How You View Yourself

We've learned that while it's important to value the feedback of others, it's imperative to value your own. Teddy Roosevelt shared the same sentiment when he said, "I care not what others think of what I do, but I care very much about

"There's no limit to what a man can do or where he can go if he doesn't mind who gets the credit."

—Ronald Reagan

“Remember always that you have not only the right to be an individual, you have an obligation to be one. You cannot make any useful contribution in life unless you do this.”

—Eleanor Roosevelt

of their own potential. People who have persistent self-doubts shy away from difficult tasks; they tend to have low aspirations and a wavering commitment to even the goals they’ve chosen to pursue. As an optimist who has earned confidence, you will have the drive to seek and achieve challenging goals both on and off the job. You’ll have earned the resilience needed to overcome the obstacles you encounter on the way to success.

Be the person you were meant to be, and manage your own

“Many people feel paralyzed by their lack of control over life. What can you do about it? For one thing, focus on all the things you do control. In doing so, you take control over your life and begin to lead your life, rather than letting life lead you.”

—Mark Sanborn

what I think of what I do! That is character!” And that kind of character takes an optimist willing to major in self-support.

When you cultivate a strong belief in your own capabilities, you will think, feel, and behave differently from those who are overly critical

motivation to make that possible. Remember, nothing is more affirming and effective in gaining a realistic self-confidence than a healthy dose of accurate self-recognition.

So, what’s working for you? In fact, what did you do this week that’s worth celebrating with others? Now, document what you did and go celebrate!



# Simple Pleasures: The Optimist's Wild Card

*“Is not life a hundred times too short for us to bore ourselves?”*  
—Friedrich Nietzsche

**W**hile meditating in the chapel at the La Casa de Maria Retreat Center in Santa Barbara, California, my eyes caught a Zen saying on the wall: “After ecstasy—the laundry.” I laughed out loud. There was wisdom in those few words, but I wasn’t sure what it was. Was it that we appreciate the joy of ecstasy but somehow forget the hard work involved in making it possible? Was it that there is as much joy in doing laundry as in a mountaintop experience? Maybe it wasn’t even meant as wisdom. Could it be that it was some Zen master’s to-do-list? I came to realize that, for me, there can be as much personal satisfaction in some simple activities

“Enjoy pleasures, but let them be your own, and then you will taste them.”

—Lord Chesterton

and chores as there is in many grand and expensive experiences. Both are part of life. When asked why I don't pay someone else to do my gardening, I have a simple answer: My gardening gives me satisfaction. Why would I pay someone to take over an activity that I enjoy doing?

Life deals you a number of wild cards that, when played well, can give you an optimism advantage. With this chapter's wild card, there is another benefit; you are entitled to designate what is wild. After all, the pastimes in which you find simple pleasure aren't necessarily the same for others. The trick is finding what it is in your world that can transform a bad day and bring you back to a positive mind-set. So what activities bring you joy, peace, or even a moment's relief? If you can't think of any, then you have some work to do!

"I have five kids, 10 and under. If I can make them smile, or better yet, laugh, I become just about the most positive man alive."

—John J. Serrano

Most of us have heard kids complain, "There's nothing to do!" Faced with bins of toys, a garage full of sporting equipment, and video games galore, they can still make a claim of utter boredom. I've seen some

of those children grow up to be adults who keep sharing a version of the same complaint: "Nothing interests me!" Do you look into a mirror at a person like that?

### **Truth #34: Engage in Simple Pleasures That Impact Your Attitude**

Far too many people keep trying to find new ways to improve the quality of their lives while neglecting the simple pleasures they already know bring them joy. Don't be one of these people. Recognize that your world is full of simple pleasures and that the variety of interests and experiences you can have only expands as you age. No matter how much money you have, you still have the freedom and the opportunity to exercise countless choices in what you can do.

Simple pleasures are just that—uncomplicated, unpretentious experiences that affect your attitude and feelings. In these complex and stressful times, the desire for simplicity is becoming more and more preferred—and even essential.

“You can’t have it all, but when you know what’s important, you don’t want it all anyway.”

—Mark Sanborn

Watching people buy increasingly larger homes early on—only to see them move to smaller homes, and eventually even apartments, later in life—made me realize an important truth. Even when you win the rat race, you’re still sapped by having to collect, pay for, and manage all your stuff, not to mention finding a place to store it all. Buying bigger, better, faster may help the economy, but it burdens you with possessions you have to take care of.

## Simple Pleasures Are Simple and Often Inexpensive

As I already discussed previously, my son Sean went on a mission trip to Mexico several years ago and arrived home marveling at the happiness of the children he met. They had none of the possessions he treasured, but they were happy to play with a discarded hubcap and a stick to keep it rolling. Instead of piling up unused toy treasures, these children used their imagination to foster shared joy. What can one say to such an observation other than that simple, shared pleasures clearly don’t have to cost a lot of money!

Though a singular reflection made by one person, Sean’s observation actually matches empirical survey data on cultural happiness. Studies have shown that 63 percent of Mexican adults (almost two-thirds!) claimed to be “very happy” or “completely happy”—despite the fact that most live above subsistence level but are still poorer than residents of either the United States or Europe. French citizens have three times the purchasing power of Mexican citizens; however, recent happiness surveys indicated that only 35 percent of French citizens surveyed said they were very or completely

“You can never get enough of what you really don’t need.”

—Eric Hoffer

happy. How, you might wonder, can this possibly be? The answer has to do with what psychologists call “adaptation” and what economists refer to as the “hedonic treadmill.” In short, people tend to psychologically adapt to their circumstances—including their financial conditions—very quickly. An increase in income becomes the new normal; therefore, living the good life then requires more things than you currently possess in order to be very happy.

“The more things you own, the more things own you.”

—Mark Sanborn

Even with challenging economic times, Americans have, on average, become richer over the past three decades. But the

inconvenient truth is that while national income has doubled, the percentage of Americans in the same happiness study who said that they were “very happy” has remained virtually unchanged at 31 percent.

The size of one’s boat doesn’t always translate into a difference in one’s joy or happiness scale. As I paddled a small canoe through a row of expensive yachts in Balboa, California, one man smiled down at me from his fancy yacht and asked, “Do you want to trade?” I laughed. He continued, “I spend more of my Saturdays cleaning this thing than enjoying it! Somehow your canoe looks a lot easier to enjoy!”

Okay, I don’t really think he would have traded, and I don’t think my son would have changed places with any of the children he saw playing in Mexico. But the truth behind both encounters is worth repeating: Amassing possessions will never be as important as experiencing the truly enjoyable pleasures in life. He who dies with the most toys still dies. Knowing you can make choices that give you pleasure helps you claim—and sustain—your own optimism advantage.

## Simple Pleasures Often Find You

Maybe it’s something as simple as taking a walk in the park, reading an engaging novel at the library, listening to your favorite music, going to a good movie, petting your dog or stroking your cat, or engaging in a

relaxing conversation with a neighbor. All are simple pleasures that can put you in touch with what you enjoy most about life. These types of experiences

“One benefit of having cancer is that it may teach you how to enjoy one day at a time.”

—Harold Benjamin, PhD

often surface in the midst of challenging circumstances, when life seems to naturally show you what most uplifts your spirits. Such experiences can actually change habits and strengthen your appreciation for community and the simple blessings life provides.

When faced with the inconvenience of extended power outages following Hurricane Katrina, person after person reported a common reaction. For the first few days, they focused on what they didn't have—no TV, no lights, no microwave. But as the days passed, families spent more time outside. Creative games surfaced, and new community relationships were nurtured. Neighbors who never saw one another became valued friends. The loss of modern-day conveniences opened the door to a long-lost community lifestyle that was far more satisfying and affirming. You may enjoy watching TV, but that TV won't be there to watch over you during the tough times. Engaged neighbors care; they are there for you, as you are for them.

## Taking Nature for a Ride on the Wild Side

As young psychologists, my colleagues and I developed COPE Wilderness Workshops—a program that combined wilderness survival training with assertiveness training by the campfire. We'd teach participants how to survive both in the woods of the Sierras—and when facing the wild beasts of Los Angeles back home.

Unfortunately, we were forced to stop the workshops because lawyers told us how much we could lose if someone didn't survive. The liability insurance coverage cost more than the revenue the programs produced. All who participated survived, but the program didn't.

“May you live all the days of your life.”

—Jonathan Swift

“Walk on a rainbow trail; walk  
on a trail of song, and all about  
you will be beauty. There is a  
way out of every dark mist,  
over a rainbow trail.”

—Navajo Song

However, since the COPE Wilderness Workshops, I’ve had a fallback plan that I find very reassuring. If my wife and I ever lost our home and jobs, we could grab our backpacks and head for the hills, spending

each night at a different lake, living off the land, and sleeping under a star-studded sky. Simply knowing how little you need to survive gives you confidence that you can handle whatever life throws your way and still maintain a high-quality life worth living. Any wilderness is teeming with simple pleasures just waiting to be experienced. My wife, however, is not so sure about the wild animals who might see us as a simple pleasure worth eating.

## Needlepoint and Other Therapeutic Pleasures

Earlier in my life—and early in our marriage—my wife and I faced many challenges. I started our company right out of graduate school. I figured, why not? We were already used to poverty; we had nothing to lose. However, this also meant that discretionary money was nonexistent. If you wanted something, you looked for ways to make it—or improve it—yourself.

For instance, we bought an antique (translation: old) upright piano. The bench was worn and needed a fresh needlepoint cover to give it new life. Thankfully, my wife’s grandmother had given her an unfinished needlepoint project that would fit perfectly. She was not as enthused as I was about completing the project, so I volunteered to get instructions at a local craft store.

Long before NFL football Hall of Famer Rosey Grier took up the craft, I added my needles, cover, and thread into a side pocket on my briefcase. I’d pull it out on the plane or while waiting for boarding. The looks—and occasional comments—from men and women alike made it a fun conversation piece. And even more surprising was the simple pleasure needlepoint provided. I discovered a secret that most

men never realize; these mindless finger movements are actually therapeutic. Lost in sheer methodical repetition settles you, like a slow run through a park without the sweating. And there's the added benefit of actually having something to show for your therapy. That needlepoint is still in our living room, and now you know the rest of the story.

Since those early days, I've taken time to experience other crafts, like making stained glass windows and quilting. Maybe

"No pleasure endures  
unseasoned by variety."

—Publilius Syrus

it's in my genes. At various stages of his life, my father took up woodworking, carving, silver jewelry, coin collecting, mosaics, and other crafts. They brought him joy as well as an endless supply of treasured gifts to bestow upon others. He engaged in all of his hobbies with a passion that brought him both a mental recess and satisfaction.

Simple pleasures like these can be incredibly therapeutic. When Diana Harberts's husband died at age 61, she was left with a hurting heart and a closet full of his clothes—a constant reminder of her loss. A longtime quilter who used this art form to preserve memories, Diana decided to make a quilt of some of her husband's favorite garments to provide a touching way to keep his memories close to her and their daughter, Joanna. The front of the quilt was more formal, with his clothes and ties from work; the back was more casual, with knit shirts and pullovers.

Diana's daughter, Joanna, sleeps with the quilt. Since she used to give back rubs to her father, rubbing the fabric on the quilt was like rubbing him. The quilt has not only been comforting to the family; so many other people requested similar quilts that Diana started a home business that she's named One More Hug. She encourages people not to wash the clothes before giving them to her, because family members often value the smell and perfume that remains in the fabric.

What kinds of activities are therapeutic for you? What hobbies take you away from life's stress and bring you peace and pleasure? As an adventurous soul, what additional experiences are you willing to try?

## Truth #35: Find the Music That Makes Your Soul and Attitude Sing

“Birds sing after a storm. Why shouldn’t we?”

—Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy

In a world of iPods, iPhones, and other fancy audio equipment, more and more people are experiencing the power of

music. As radio talk show host Dennis Prager loves to say, “The only research I respect is research that supports what common sense has long before affirmed.” You don’t need elaborate studies to tell you that music is one of life’s gifts and that listening to your favorite songs is one of the simple pleasures that makes the ride worthwhile.

What music would be on your playlist? How are you using it to impact your attitude? You know what music works for you, so your job is to find and then experience the right tunes at the moments in your life when you need them the most. The good news for music lovers everywhere is that songs have never been more accessible and easier to enjoy. Take advantage of your musical wild card when your optimism needs a momentary lift. Instead of having your blood pressure rise as you listen to your daily dose of negative news, try tuning in your favorite music station—and watch that blood pressure drop.

## Truth #36: Turn the Love of a Pet into a Health Break and Attitude Boost

Nancy, a local volunteer, spends many Saturdays taking her therapy dog Sadie to hospitals in Southern California. After hours of ongoing training, they bring smiles and joy to bed-bound patients who come alive as their hands reach out to pet Sadie. Such animal-assisted

“After silence, that which comes nearest to expressing the inexpressible is music.”

—Aldous Huxley

therapy volunteers have been shown to improve patient attitudes and promote health.

Of course, you don’t have to share your pets with others



to reap their countless benefits. Most pet owners rave about the joys of sharing their homes and lives with an animal—whether that pet is a cocker spaniel, a calico cat, or a chameleon. And even beyond the pleasure they bring is the mental health boost these nonhuman companions can provide on even

the worst of days. There's nothing like a pet's unconditional love to warm your heart and lower your blood pressure.

Admittedly, pets of all kinds can be costly; they demand time, care, attention, and extra planning. There are vet bills to consider, along with those early morning and late night obligatory dog walks. But a host of research studies have shown that pets can be helpful in treating the mentally ill, revitalizing the elderly, motivating the disabled, relieving the lonely, and giving a renewed sense of purpose to the grieving.

If your living situation won't allow it or you can't afford the expense, don't worry. Even offering to take a neighbor's dog on a walk can significantly boost your mood. A Swedish study revealed that people who walked a dog experienced an improvement in the quality of interaction with others. Sixty-three percent of dog owners surveyed said their pets had added to their opportunities to talk to people, and 57 percent said their dogs had "made them friends."

Unlike usually unpredictable people, pets don't talk back, are consistently welcoming, and love being loved. They give people a living being to care for that makes them feel needed and wanted. While physical contact with other human beings can come with a host of questions and issues, most pets crave touch and will gladly fill this most primitive and basic need.

After a devastating 1995 earthquake in Kobe, Japan, thousands of people had to be housed in halls and gymnasiums. Rules barring animals from public buildings were lifted, and people were allowed to bring their pets. "It was an eye-opening experience for everyone,"

"We all crave affection, but sometimes we find we have difficulty obtaining it from other people. Companion animals provide friendship, constancy and love. They're always there, always happy to see you."

—Dr. John Wedderburn

says Dr. Gen Kato, president of the Japanese Animal Hospital Association. “People who had pets were clearly more happy and coped better with the disaster.”

Additional studies indicate that people over age 65 who own pets made up to 30 percent fewer visits to doctors than those who had no pet. Pets may very well be one of your best attitude-adjusting simple pleasures. If you ever needed an excuse to get yourself a pet—now you have one.

### Truth #37: Reading Opens You to New Worlds and Provides a Mental Recess

“The only way to improve your life is through the books you read and the people you meet.”

—Charlie “Tremendous”  
Jones

Books are essentially treasures waiting to be found. However, in this world of cyberspace and high-definition TVs, many are trading time with a good read for a flashy multimedia experience that makes cultivating an imagination less necessary.

You’ve no doubt heard people say of many a movie: “The book was better.” With a book, there’s no condensed dialogue, no actors who don’t fit the characters, and no sets that diminish the impact of the story. Why? The amazingly personal and rich stage of your mind is always more vibrant than any movie or TV program can provide.

While a visit to the movies provides two to three hours of entertainment, picking up a novel, finding a chapter, and re-entering the world of a story you love provides an almost endless amount of joy. Such an escape provides a stress break that can work wonders in putting your life and your own challenges in perspective.

If optimism is born by claiming your history of overcoming obstacles, then nonfiction biographies afford both a distraction from daily pressure and the inspiration to meet the challenges that men and women of history have already overcome. History often repeats itself. We learn what to avoid, how to persevere, and how

to succeed by learning from both common and famous people who have left a legacy worth reading.

What books do you enjoy? Which ones help you maintain a positive attitude?

## You Don't Remember Days—You Remember Moments

Centenarians don't need scientific data to prove that happiness in old age has more to do with attitude than health. They've learned that develop-

ing effective lifestyle habits can last you a lifetime—a long lifetime. A plethora of research indicates that a positive attitude—combined with healthy living choices—can take aging well beyond average life expectancy. One study conducted by the U.S. National Institute on Aging focused on regions where people live significantly longer. One of the findings that they isolated was the importance of curiosity, play, and hobbies. Healthy centenarians keep up with their world and their interests. Finding new hobbies and pastimes may be part of the map for finding that elusive fountain of youth.

The list of possible activities is as extensive and diverse as the number of people reading this book. But whatever you pick, satisfying hobbies will provide an oasis-like experience in the deserts of your daily life—a few moments of escape from a monotonous or stressful day. Such activities will help you achieve balance between your busy life and your personal interests. Many people continue to find sports—both playing and watching—to be an enjoyable distraction. Playing provides the added advantage of building team relationships and integrating a little exercise into your daily routine.

Certainly, your choices of simple pleasures are far greater. Play a musical instrument by yourself or with others, go to a local park or beach, collect almost anything, cook zany food recipes and make others eat the results, do your own gardening, join in a little fun

“The genius of life is to be able to take childhood into old age.”

—George Burns

dancing, paint landscapes, play solitaire or poker with friends, or take photos of anything that interests you. Actually, life is so great that, with a little imagination, you can make a hobby out of the most insignificant thing, and it will still help you become more optimistic.

## The Power of a List of Memories

During one of my many presentations to health care teams on optimism, a nurse shared a story of hope and inspiration that has stayed with me for years. The names of the characters and the hospital have left me, but the inspiration remains.

“Somebody should tell us, right at the start of our lives, that we are dying. Then we might live life to the limit, every minute of every day. Do it! I say. Whatever you want to do, do it now! There are only so many tomorrows.”

—Michael Landon

A terminally ill young boy left the hospital to be at home for his last days. He was often groggy from the heavy doses of morphine that he took to relieve the pain. Handing a note to his hospice nurse was one of his last lucid moments. With a smile and an enthusiasm he had not demonstrated in

days, he told the nurse, “Give this letter to my parents when I am gone. You will know when the time is right.” She asked what was in the letter, and the boy replied, “It’s a list of all the fun moments we had. The times we laughed and couldn’t stop.”

He shared the time the family went to a party dressed as the guys in the Fruit of the Loom underwear ad. On the way to the party, the police pulled his father over for speeding. The officer could hardly stop laughing when he saw the family outfits. He let them go with a warning: “The next time you race off to join a salad bar, take it slower.”

Later that night, the nurse read his list of memories peppered with humorous anecdotes. At the end was a note to his parents that said: “I know that you are sad that I’m going away, but don’t forget this stuff. Don’t remember me sick; remember us laughing.”

It's been said, "You don't remember days; you remember moments." At today's hectic pace, it's far too easy to forget to savor the small pleasures while we make bigger plans. You may not be able to change or even number your days, but you can always change your moments. What simple pleasures are you willing to make part of your optimistic lifestyle? Hopefully, continuing to read the rest of this book will be one of them.

# Humor Is the Joker in the Hand of Life

*“Everybody has used the expression, ‘Someday we’ll laugh about this.’ My question is, why wait?”*

—Joel Goodman

**J**an was in her early 90s and still finding her way around New York City. When her car stalled at a bridge toll booth, she was unable to restart her engine. Knowing nothing about cars, she put up her hood to a chorus of honks from the irritated drivers behind her. Smiling at the man in the first car, she slowly

“The human race has only one really effective weapon, and that’s laughter. The moment it arises, all our hardness yields, all our irritations and resentments slip away, and a sunny spirit takes their place.”

—Mark Twain

walked to his door and knocked on the window. “I’m 93 years old, and I don’t know anything about cars. Optimistically, if we’re going to move, somebody is going to have to help me start my car. Why don’t you go work on my car, and I’ll take over the honking.”

When she told her newest 89-year-old boyfriend about her humorous exchange, he reminded her that she was probably too old to be driving in New York. She responded with smile, “You better be careful. I’ve buried everyone who ever told me to act my age.”

Talk about wild cards! There is no better card to play in life than the joker. Humor has a way of making even a poor hand a winner. And even if you don’t win, you have a heck of a lot more fun while losing.

Renowned psychiatrist Eric Berne was once asked to define a healthy person. He replied: “Healthy people go ‘Yes,’ ‘No,’ and ‘Whoopee!’ Unhealthy people go ‘Yes, but,’ ‘No, but,’ and ‘No whoopee!’” Giving way to laughter is one of the best ways to turn any moment into instant “Whoopee!” It also has a way of bringing other people along for the ride.

*Man’s Search for Meaning* author Viktor Frankl called laughter “the currency of hope” and a surefire way to cultivate the optimism advantage. Frankl wrote: “An outsider may be astonished to hear that one could find a sense of humor in a

“Humor is the healthy way of feeling a ‘distance’ between one’s self and the problem, a way of standing off and looking at one’s problem with perspective.”

—Rollo May

concentration camp. . . . Humor was another of the soul’s weapons in the fight for self-preservation. . . . It can afford an aloofness and an ability to rise above any situation, even if only for a few seconds.”

Frankl’s fellow inmates survived daily by inventing one amusing story to tell others. At night, they would gather to laugh together. If humor works in a situation as dire as a concentration camp, it can certainly help you cope with just about any circumstance you will ever have to face.

## **Truth #38: Use Humor as an Ever-Present Stress Breaker You Control**

One of the most compelling uses of humor is its value in reducing the stress of our crazy world. Laughter is a nonfattening,

“Worry knocked at the door,  
but hearing laughter, it hurried  
away.”

—Ben Franklin

contagious, pleasant tranquilizer that doesn’t have any major side effects. It can help people live longer, healthier lives and recover more quickly

from stress-related illnesses. Humor provides the counterbalance to life’s more somber moments. It’s your inner upper, your mental recess, your ever-present safety valve, and one of the most effective stress breaks you will ever find.

After one couple managed to escape a raging California fire with nothing but their lives, the husband confided to a reporter, “We’ll be fine. We’ve lost our home, but we’ve got the clothes on our back. We’ve had to start over before, and we can do it again.” The reporter was confused as the man’s wife began to laugh and even more perplexed as the husband joined in. The wife—aware that the reporter was unsure of how to proceed in the live, on-scene broadcast—said to the camera, “My husband is right. We had to leave so fast, all we do have is the clothes on our back. Neither one of us have underwear!”

Even the cameraman had trouble keeping the image steady as the crew burst into laughter. Everyone watching was left with the sense that this couple was going to survive their personal catastrophe just fine. In fact, the woman’s humorous comment turned a typical disaster news report into much-needed humor therapy for all those facing the loss of their own property. The reporter ended the coverage with the line, “Looks like I’m the only one here with underwear. Back to you in the studio!” Who would bet against this optimistic couple’s ability to bounce back quickly from their loss?

Author and professor Norman Cousins observed the following during his own struggle with cancer: “Laughter interrupts the panic cycle of an illness.” While it may not be a cure for cancer, there is

“Warning: Laughter may be  
hazardous to your illness.”

—Nurses for Laughter

some clinical evidence that laughter mobilizes the human body’s defenses and reduces pain. Apparently, humankind



has been aware of humor's value for some time. The ancient Greeks included a visit to the "home of comedians" in their healing centers as part of their *therapeia* process.

In his book *From Victim to Victor: For Cancer Patients and Their Families*, Harold Benjamin shared the insightful comment of one cancer patient at Cancer Support Community, "I know laughter is good for me. I don't know if it is helping me get better, but it makes me feel better—not only mentally but physically as well—and it takes my mind off my own situation.

"Humor gives us the freedom to act. Patients can be so paralyzed by conflicts and self-imposed restrictions that they forget they are free to act to change their circumstances."

—Dr. Weeled A. Salameh

Life and its pleasures have become very real to me and I know just how important it is to enjoy each enjoyable minute. So when something strikes me as laughable, I laugh. I want to be conscious of every joyful part of life."

And if you still need more scientific proof of this, research supports a direct correlation between laughter and levels of catecholamines in the blood, triggering the release of endorphins in our brain. Endorphins are one of nature's built-in painkillers, and they are what incites the feeling of pleasure that occurs after a good workout session or a hearty laugh. Humor isn't just fun; it actually is healthy for you.

Additionally, a variety of muscles are activated when you laugh. When you stop laughing, those muscles relax. Because muscle tension tends to magnify pain, many people suffering painful conditions can often benefit greatly from a healthy dose of laughter.

If you are someone who doubts the value of humor in medicine, you are not alone. The late columnist Art Buchwald once reacted to an American Medical Association article on the importance of laughter by writing his own humorous letter to the editor: "There is still a lot of work to be done before the Food and Drug Administration will permit it to be used in large doses. Many unanswered questions remain: if laughter is good for your health, why don't

doctors ever laugh when they are with their patients? Is it possible to transplant a sense of humor? If it is so good as a medicine, why doesn't Medicare pay for it?"

Maybe we ought to change the adage to say, "It only hurts when you don't laugh!" Even in the face of serious disease, patients are able to make choices. Someone who's diagnosed with terminal cancer can fight for life or usher in an early funeral. Think of the attitude difference in these two comments: "I don't think I'm going to last much longer" versus "Life is terminal. If I'm going to die soon, I'm going to have fun with every moment I have left." Who would you bet on living longer?

## Not All Humor Works to Produce Optimism

"Some people can make others laugh at others, some with others. Does your humor isolate or bring together?"

—Norman Cousins

Unfortunately, many have forgotten the value of humor in making us more resilient during this age of constant change and uncertainty. Far too many people walk around

looking like they're in pain. You know the ones; instead of leaving their cars *in park*, they leave their faces *in park*. Don't let that be you! Let there be smiles, laughter, and joy, and let it begin with you.

It is true, however, that not all humor works; some creates laughter at the expense of others. So keep your humor positive and life enhancing; leave sarcasm and jokes that make fun of others out of your repertoire. Even if you don't offend everyone, chances are that you will offend someone. If in doubt, leave questionable humor out. After all, you don't need negative humor when there is so much positive humor available every day.

Laurence Peter said it best: "Realize that a sense of humor is deeper than laughter and more satisfying than comedy and delivers more rewards than merely being entertaining. A sense of humor sees the fun in everyday experiences. It is more important to have fun than it is to be funny."

Translation: Leave room for laughter every day, and always be ready to invite humor into your life. Great humor is warmer than scripted jokes because it connects to our shared funny experiences both on and off the job. You aren't laughing at anyone; you are laughing with them. Natural humor is there if you have eyes to see, enjoy, and share it with others.

"A jest's prosperity lies in the ear of him that hears it, never in the tongue of him that makes it."

—Shakespeare

### **Truth #39: Take Your Life and Work Seriously, but Take Yourself Lightly**

The safest target for your humor will always be yourself. If you can learn to laugh at your errors, the world will laugh with you—not at you. Only the self-confident can admit their mistakes. Laughing at your own errors will help you let go of mistakes and rebound quicker to get back into the game, and that's what optimism is all about.

We all like to be with people who are comfortable in their own skin—pimples, warts, receding hairlines, and all. It's usually a good rule of thumb to take your work and life seriously but yourself—and your problems—a bit more lightly. Just remember, if you laugh at yourself before others do, you win. Self-deprecating humor is therapeutic and attractive to others.

Bill Cosby knew the value of a humorous perspective when he observed: "You can turn painful situations around through laughter. If you can find humor in anything, even poverty, you can survive it." We've discussed plenty of examples of this: the children in Mexico my son met on his mission trip, the California couple who managed to joke on camera moments after their home was destroyed by a fire, and the countless cancer patients who used their humor to battle their disease. It truly seems that happiness and optimism are more a matter of your internal attitude than any external realities.

"A person without a sense of humor is like a wagon without springs—jolted by every pebble in the road."

—Henry Ward Beecher

## Teams Work Better with Humor as a Social Lubricant and Attitude Adjuster

Working with others can naturally create some friction—as well as ample opportunities for you to use humor to diffuse this tension. The amount of negative stress that your team experiences in any situation will usually vary according to the ways that members perceive that circumstance. The same situation can create panic in one person and generate laughter from another. Well-placed humor can break the urgency cycle and create a drastically different and less stressful perception for the whole team. It also has the potential to promote some pretty constructive problem solving. Since humor and creativity are highly correlated, use it whenever you can. Instead of being consumed with crises, learn to roll good-naturedly with what life gives you. If you have friends or associates who—at the most opportune moment in a shared crisis have a way of saying something so bizarre that everyone laughs—give them free reign to work their magic whenever they can.

During one of my presentations, for example, two health care leaders laughed a little too hard when I discussed the use of humor in minimizing conflict. When challenged, they shared a story of how humor helped turn around their strained relationship. The director of nursing hadn't been pleased with some of the changes that the new administrator was putting into place. After

“Stay out of fun’s way. If you are a structured funster, don’t get so caught up in orchestrating other people’s merriment that you become oblivious or resentful of outbreaks of actual fun that may occur naturally, in the wild, as it were. . . . Don’t push too hard.”

—Jack Gordon

a particularly frustrating conversation in his office, she had exploded. For fear of saying something she would regret, she stopped mid-sentence and stormed out of the office.

Later in the day, she turned a corner and saw the administrator approaching down the hall. Rather than turn around or face him, she decided to enter the next available door.

It was a closet. Hoping that he would not know it was a closet, she closed herself into the small dark space. Listening intently from inside the closet, she waited until she heard no footsteps. Slowly, she started to open the door. Suddenly, it was thrust open by the administrator who said with a smile: “Do you enjoy it in there?”

She grabbed the administrator’s suit coat and said in panic, “Don’t you dare tell anyone I was in there . . .” He started laughing, saying, “I won’t. I promise.” She soon realized that she hadn’t merely threatened him; she had almost lifted her boss off the floor! His disarming laughter proved contagious, and she soon blushed and joined in.

From that moment forward, every time their disagreements needed a humor break, he’d just look at her and smile.

“Laughter is the shortest  
distance between two people.”  
—Victor Borge

She would move her lips silently in a clear message—“Don’t you dare!”

Shared laughter has a way of moving people beyond the adversity and into problem solving with a fresh—and much more manageable—perspective. Why cry when you can laugh? Why get stuck in a cloud of worry when you can get busy coping with the problem after a good laugh?

There is a reason that sales professionals often have a good supply of humorous stories. Humor works; people like doing business with people who bring them joy and make them smile. Frustrated with his inability to get an appointment with a critical customer, one sales representative delivered a homing pigeon with a note to the prospect’s office that read, “If you’d like to know more about our product, throw our representative out the window!” Another salesperson, before catching a flight back home, bought a \$500,000 flight policy naming a reluctant prospect as the beneficiary. He sent it to the prospect with a handwritten note: “Last time I left your office without an appointment, I bought this policy. I wanted you to know my last thoughts were of you and what you are missing by not meeting with me!” He got an appointment with him the next time he came to town.

Laughter—and cynicism—are equally contagious. Which would you prefer to give to others? You know the answer; we love to be around those who radiate joy. People consistently rate a sense of humor as one of the most valued attributes of friends, loved ones, and associates. Though what's on the outside might diminish with age, the spark of joyful humor that you carry with you is a hard light to put out.

### **Truth #40: Cultivate Humorous One-Liners That Invite Laughter into Your Life**

It doesn't take much to unleash the humor advantage. While speaking at a youth leadership conference at a major university, I mentioned how one-liners can help reframe even your worst day. A month later, a letter arrived from a young woman thanking me for what has become one of her favorite quotes: "Some days you're the bug; some days the windshield!"

You can give the gift of a humorous perspective as well, simply by using a few memorized one-liners that invite a change in perspective. They're urgency breakers that can transform even life's most frustrating moments. Do any of these statements work for you? What might you add to the list?

"This life is a test. It is only a test. If it had been a real life, I would have been given instructions on where to go and what to do."

"Is this some hidden video show?"

"Where's my mother? She usually takes care of days like this!"

"Are we having fun yet?"

"This may be the worst day of my life. Then again, I've only kept statistics since 1995."

"Did you ever have a day when you felt like a fire hydrant and everyone you met was a dog?"

One-liners that work provide ready statements that any team or family member can use to bring humorous relief to others.

Such declarations have a way of reminding others that laughter is a handy joker to add to any of life's bad hands—on and off the job.

But don't stop with memorizing a few one-liners. Welcome to the challenge of making humor work for you.

## Developing Your Sense of Humor Takes Work

You may not be known for your sense of humor and may even wonder whether it's possible for you to cultivate one. But if you act happy, you will feel happier, and if you work at developing your sense of humor, you will find all the laughter you need.

No two people have the same sense of humor. You must start by recognizing what makes you laugh and then put more of whatever that is in your life. Open a humor file in your computer and type in your best stories, quotes, or jokes. Collecting these tidbits will stimulate your own memories of both personal and professional humorous encounters. Just add them to your file as you find them.

Lifting or borrowing humor created by others that is entertaining helps you develop a sense of wit that works specifically for you. Soon, enjoying the humor of others will allow you to generate your own spontaneous, humorous contributions to life. Others may soon say, "What happened to you? Are you on something? Did you get a humor bone transplant?" Just reply, "I'm learning to bring a little more humor into my life. Join me!"

"A day without laughter is a day wasted."

—Charlie Chaplin

After an 85-year-old woman was evacuated to a community shelter during a Santa Barbara fire, she helped others in the gym cope with the cramped conditions by saying with a smile, "In 85 years, I've never been able to go to summer camp. Isn't this a blessing?" One's perspective can change in an instant with one simple dose of humor.

## Truth #41: Stretch Your Humor Muscles Daily

Keep copies of your favorite comedies or TV shows and watch them when you need a lift. Buy the ones that you want to watch over and over again; rent those that people say are worth watching. Keep a col-

lection of your favorite cartoons and funny pictures; have one at the office and one at home. The comics you collect tell you more about your family and job than any description could provide, because we have a tendency to laugh at cartoons, pictures, and stories that remind us of our shared experiences. Your organization doesn't just have a serious culture; it has a humor history worth treasuring.

Send occasional humor messages to whatever online networks you frequent. It's the short funny videos on YouTube and the humorous comments on your favorite social network that get the most attention. They are positively viral; you just can't help but smile. YouTube has an almost unlimited and ever-growing collection of short videos capturing the lighter side of life. When you begin sharing humor you enjoy with others, you can create a lighthearted network that everyone will appreciate.

In these stressful times on the job, suggest putting up a humor board or laugh spot in your employee lounge. Something like this is an ongoing reminder to keep humor working. Breaks will take on a new dimension—one that's creative, stress reducing, and enlivening. Encourage people to get involved by adding their own pieces to the humorous collections.

Promote creativity by displaying cartoons with no captions and let associates make their own. Post memo bloopers and funny stories from the Internet. With imagination and frequent pruning, you just may harvest an untapped supply of new cartoons, anecdotes, and sayings for your humor collection. What would you want to include in order to increase your team's laughter quotient?

"Have fun at what you do. It will be reflected in your work. No one likes a grump except another grump!"

—Bill Swanson, Raytheon  
CEO



Of course, it's vital to monitor the contributions to remove any comments or material that might be offensive or inappropriate. Let people know that this is designed to cultivate positive humor. In that same vein, don't get mad; get funny! Try sharing humorous incidents instead of negative gossip when you talk to coworkers. Take time to initiate and discuss humor over dinner at home. The more you look for amusement, the more you're apt to find. Always be ready to say, "That's funny!"

## Keep Your Optimism Laced with Laughter

Many of your best memories are laced with laughter, so promise yourself that you'll have more fun in your life and you will

"He that is of a merry heart  
hath a continual feast."

—Proverbs 15:15

become more optimistic. Keep an air of playfulness in everything you do, and take time to laugh and smile daily. After all, when God created Adam and Eve and they ate that apple, he took back the apartment with a view, gave them a baby, and made them work. Then—to keep the whole thing from falling apart—he granted them a sense of humor as a ready sidekick to help them survive.

Let me close this chapter with a wise motto from Russ Walden, a successful company president: "If you aren't having fun in your work, fix the problem before it becomes serious; ask for help if you need it. If you can't fix it and won't ask for help, please go away before you spoil the fun for the rest of us." That's good advice.

He who laughs . . . lasts! That's worth remembering as you journey through these uncertain and changing times. Now, let there be laughter, and let it start with you.

# Build an Optimistic Network that Works

*“Thank you Lord for the success of my friends and the fewness of my enemies! May all my friends achieve their fondest dreams.”*

—Ben Franklin’s Morning Prayer

**T**here is one final—and very important—wild card that needs to be played. If you want to be optimistic, spend more time with other optimistic people willing to encourage and support you.

“One’s attitude is a lot about the people you hang around with. When you lie with dogs, you get fleas. Some people bring you down; others bring you up. I’ve learned to spend more time with people who bring me up.”

—Gary McGinnis

In the words of legendary American author Mark Twain: “Keep away from people who try to belittle your ambitions. Small people always do that, but the really great make you feel that you, too, can become great.”

The company you keep can pull you up or bring you down, so pick your friends, mentors, and colleagues wisely. You know the difference people can make in your life. Spend more time with those who do.

## Truth #42: Thank the People Who Have Helped and Encouraged You

*Let Your Life Speak* author Parker Palmer reminds us: “Some teachers shine a light that allows growth to flourish, while others cast a shadow under which seedlings die.” You know the bosses and teachers you’re glad you no longer have to deal with. You also know which ones made you better.

Fred Rogers, former host of the children’s television show *Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood*, was a frequent and popular speaker. Every time he spoke, he’d ask those attending to pause for a minute of silence to think about all those people

“At times our own light goes out and is rekindled by a spark from another person. Each of us has cause to think with deep gratitude of those who have lighted the flame within us.”

—Albert Schweitzer

who helped them become who they are. Maybe it would be a supportive boss, a challenging teacher, a loving grandparent, or an eccentric neighbor. But it was always that moment of silence that they would thank him for.

Do the same for yourself as you read this book. Who would you think of in this moment of silence? Who are your private everyday cheerleaders and mentors whose presence, acceptance, and availability made the difference at critical turns in your life? Sometimes they fan the flame within you and ignite a spark that transforms your gifts into a career dream. Or maybe they deliver a heartfelt compliment that makes you feel valued. Perhaps it’s even their unspoken support—their mere presence during times of both trouble and happiness—that means the most. In some way, they believed in you, perhaps even before you believed in yourself.

If special people come to mind, don't just appreciate them; take the time to actually go and thank them. If you can't think of anyone, you've got some effort you'll need to invest to make your *net work*. It's time for you to seek out a few more supportive people who believe in you and encourage the best in you.

### Truth #43: Put Your Calendar Where Your Priorities Are

Professional catalyst and speaker Toni Newman wanted to find an innovative way to let people know that she was on vacation and would not be checking her messages until her return. When you called her office you heard: "If you get this message, please be aware that I am being held hostage by two wonderful children under the age of six. They have hidden my Blackberry and my cell phone. They have locked me out of my office and away from my computer. The red light on my phone blinks helplessly but alas, I am forbidden to check my messages. Their demands are simple. Two weeks of my undivided attention. If I obey, I will be allowed to return to my office on Monday, August 1st. I look forward to reconnecting with you then."

The response to her message was phenomenal, and it also ended up being a wonderful marketing tool. It differentiated Newman

"The greatest discovery I've made is that if I were to be hit and killed by a big truck today, I'd be replaced at work tomorrow. But I'll never be replaced at home. I'd be missed there forever. Stop giving your family the leftovers of yourself. Remind yourself that a wider path to success is out there, one that is wide enough for family, friends, and fun."

—Jeff Conley

from the norm and showed her clients that striking a balance between one's personal and professional life can be a fun and profitable way to live. In a world where far too many of us are checking our Blackberry, iPhone, or wireless Internet connection every chance we get, it's time to discover that everyone needs some time to disconnect and just breathe a bit slower.

Although everyone talks a good game about achieving

balance in life, it's obviously much easier said than done. Most of our professional lives are focused on making critical appointments, achieving business goals, attending important meetings, and completing tasks in time for demanding deadlines. Personal relationships and gatherings tend to be relegated to "let's get together soon" promises. Unfortunately, soon never seems to get into your calendar, and work conveniently expands to fill your available time. But it doesn't have to be that way and shouldn't be that way, if you want to be more optimistic.

Making time for your family and friends is essential to maintaining a positive outlook, especially in these challenging times, when there are countless reasons to do so. If you don't find some sort of happy medium between your personal and professional lives, you actually risk

"The trouble with the rat race is that even if you win, you're still a rat."

—Lily Tomlin

losing your vitality on the job. You need more than work relationships; you need people you can have fun with, caring friends, faith communities, and individuals who embrace similar hobbies and enjoy the same kind of entertainment as you. Spending time with your energy-boosting relationships can do wonders to improve your attitude and rejuvenate your motivation on and off the job.

But how do you make it a habit to find this kind of balance? Affiliated partner of venture capital firm Kleiner Perkins Caufield & Byers Vinod Khosla knows the importance of metrics in measuring company priorities. As a leader, he's also aware of how vital deadlines, stretch goals, and weekly monitoring of progress are. Khosla has applied those same tools to his personal commitments: "People also need to place metrics around their priorities. I track how many times I get home in time to have dinner with my family; my assistant reports the exact number to me each month. My goal is to be home for dinner at least 25 nights a month." Do you measure anything like this? What might you find if you did?

If you don't think that keeping metrics would work for you, try a different approach. Your calendar is your creed; it shows what really matters to you. What you schedule, you do. So start by making a few dates with the friends and family who matter most. Buy a few tickets

and get those events in your calendar. Don't worry; when you've paid good money for theater, concert, or sporting event tickets, you'll find a way to get everything done so that you can go. When you already have tickets, you'll plan for your on-time exit by getting important things done early. If coworkers come in and start to waste your time, you'll end the conversation quickly. You'll remind your boss, "I've got tickets. I have to leave at four." In short, you know what you do when you have tickets; you leave on time!

In fact, we'd like to have tickets every day and be willing to give them up when job demands truly require it. Count time at your son's soccer, coffee with friends, or a night out with your spouse as tickets. It's time you commit to your work and your life. When you live with both passion and commitment, you'll be more optimistic and significantly healthier—both mentally and physically.

## Good Relationships Promote Health, Happiness, and Optimism

Carnegie-Mellon University researcher Sheldon Cohen summed up his research by saying, "Someone who works, has a family and goes bowling with a group has an edge on a person whose life is work. With each added relationship you have, the less likely you are to become ill." While this doesn't necessarily mean that you have to go bowling, you do need to do more than work. Few people want the phrase "I finished everything on my to-do-list!" written on their tombstones. Treat the investments of your time and your team members' time as carefully and respectfully as you do your financial investments.

"A crucial strategy is to stay connected to friends and relatives. Find emotional support. Loneliness is a major stressor that can heighten every other problem."

—Barbara Basler

Unfortunately, the people with whom you most want to spend time are people you have to schedule time to even see. The people you want to see least, on the other hand, have a knack of finding you wherever you are. As a wise senior citizen

suggested, “Pretend your life has a dance card, and fill it every day with people who make your days dance to the music of life!”

What dates do you need to make? What tickets do you need to buy?

## Truth #44: Avoid Pits People and Worrywarts!

We introduced you to *Pits People* in Chapter 9 on gratitude. Whenever you ask them how they are, they reply with a steady stream of complaints. Any attempt at countering their negativity results in a “yes, but” and further evidence of how impossible it is to overcome life’s challenges because of what they face. They play hopeless, and they want you to play hope. When you do, they can shoot down your suggestions to avoid personal responsibility and any kind of constructive action. Don’t just walk away from these people; run away.

Not all families and friends are created equal; some are supportive, and others are not. If you find yourself faced with a family that isn’t particularly supportive of you, work to create your own family of encouragers. This doesn’t have to include anyone to whom you’re related; it can simply be a collection of people you are close to who consistently provide you with the encouragement you need. Similarly, if your friends spend time awfulizing or trapping you in the rearview mirror by ruminating about things you can’t control or change, start to build some new friendships.

*Overcoming the Odds* author Emmy Werner wrote about the importance of establishing and cultivating a supportive community. She explains: “In an extensive study of resilience, researchers . . . tracked 505 children from early childhood to age 40. Almost a third came from homes troubled by poverty, alcoholism, divorce and other obstacles. Yet, in spite of these obstacles, the majority of this ‘high-risk’ group overcame their hardships. What made the difference? The resilient kids possessed hope, determination and a strong sense of

“Sometimes people need new friends—people who will problem-solve with them and not indulge in ‘tit-for-tat’ worrying sessions.”

—Susan Holen-Hoeksema

community and religious faith. Plus, they were able to cultivate emotional support from outside their troubled families. All these factors helped them improve themselves and their lives.” In short, the people we surround ourselves with really do make a difference in our lives.

For example, women are more likely to have a good network of friends. But are they the right friends? Some women keep you focused on the problems; others encourage you to bounce back stronger. Susan Nolen-Hoeksema, psychologist and author of *Women Who Think Too Much*, shared her research findings: “Women fall into what I call ‘endless analysis of the past, present and future.’ If they’re upset, they tend to call friends who hold a magnifying glass to every little angle. At the first sign of problems men head out for a game of pickup basketball or other distractions. ‘Later,’ they say. So who is better off? There’s a downside to stewing over life’s issues. It amplifies sadness, makes problems harder and alienates others. Women are twice as likely as men to develop depression. But women who act more like men—distracting themselves first and then plotting solutions—have the same depression rate as men.”

Now, before I get flooded with letters from my readers, men can certainly learn a few things from women as well. Many men will talk to no one when they are hurting and, instead, tend to rely solely on themselves. They won’t tell a soul that anything is amiss until after they have handled their own problems. And those men who do talk about their problems often prefer to talk with women rather than their male friends. In fact, most married men claim their best friend is their spouse. Men could take a cue from women and spend some time developing friendships with other males who care, listen, and encourage timely problem solving without threatening their relationship. Both genders find it easier to be optimistic when they have friends who support and encourage them.

### **Truth #45: Fill Your Village with People Who Make a Difference**

Always remember that no matter how dysfunctional your past or current relationships were or are, you can build a supportive



community that helps you move out of the rearview mirror of your life and into inventing a more optimistic future.

“None of us is as smart as all of us.”

—Satchel Paige

But where do you begin in building a strong and satisfying community?

Most people count on their spouse or partner for the lion’s share of their emotional support. Obviously, working to maintain such a relationship with a spouse is important and ought to be evident in your calendar commitments. But there are dangers in depending too much on one person.

Barbara Ehrenreich talked about this concern in a magazine article for *Time*: “Today, a spouse is expected to be not only a co-provider and mate, but a co-parent, financial partner, romantic love object, best friend, fitness advisor, home repair-person and scintillating companion through the wasteland of Sunday afternoon. This is more than any one spouse can provide. What we lack is not ‘values’ but the old-fashioned neighborhood or community. Once people found companionship among their old high school buddies and got help with child-raising from grandparents and aunts. Marriages lasted because less was expected of them. If you wanted a bridge partner or plumber or confidant, you had a whole village to choose from. Today we don’t marry a person, i.e., a flawed and limited human being; we attempt to marry a village.”

Sometimes you can depend on a spouse or significant other too much. Don’t expect your partner to fill every role, especially those better filled by others. Men used to have time at the tavern; women would gather with other women. This time apart served important functions that are now either politically incorrect or squeezed out of our busy schedules.

## There’s More to Connection Than Cyberspace

The majority of Americans have a committed partner or loving family, work relationships, and a commute between the two. But there is very little sense of caring on the freeways.

“The ability to sell, explain, persuade, organize, motivate, and lead others still holds first place. Making things happen still requires the ability to make people like you, respect you, listen to you, and want to connect to you. And by connect, I mean connect personally, not digitally. The human connection will always, always, always outrank the digital connection as a get-ahead skill.”

—Karl Albrecht

In fact, loneliness in the midst of millions of people may become the real disease of our age. More and more people live, work, and play alone in their individual, digitized worlds. We are insulated and often obsessed with our personalized iPods, computer games, BlackBerries, and HDTVs. Outside our cyberspace social networks, it's no longer clear where we connect to real people. Too many people belong to nothing: no community groups, no faith assemblies, no service groups, no sport

teams. They settle for texting a few tweets of 140 words or less, but they don't get many touches.

Are you squirming while reading this? If something happened to your partner or your job, what relationships would be there for you? Would your network provide the support and the opportunities you need in today's changing, stressful world? How alone—or connected—are you?

## Coming to Grips with Your Own Relationship Deficits

Author, executive, and speaker Harvey Mackay shared an early life lesson: “My father handed me a Rolodex when I was 18 and said, ‘Every person you meet for the rest of your life goes into this. You add a little something about them on the back of the card—family, hobbies, et cetera. And you cultivate that Rolodex like a garden.’” Today, that Rolodex has been traded in for a contact management database, but the need to cultivate your contacts like a garden remains.

It's time for you to take all of your relationships seriously. No single person can fill all the needs you have to support your

optimistic future, so think of people in your network who meet these various needs. If you notice holes, identify any who might be able to make up your personal support team, your vital village.

**People Who Care.** Who are the nurturers who listen, encourage, support, acknowledge, and emotionally support you?

**People Who Confront.** Who are the truth tellers in your life who care enough to confront you privately when you need to make changes?

**People with Expertise.** Who are the experts you value most on the job, in your profession, and in your areas of interest who help you learn what you need or want to know?

**People with Social Contacts.** Who are the critical hub people who know a vast array of the people you need to know to achieve your goals on and off the job?

**People to Play with.** Who are the people who share your passion and make time to join you in enjoying your interests, hobbies, and activities?

**People Who Feed Your Need for Community.** Who are your soul mates, the ones who share your beliefs and nurture your common values?

You've read the questions, so where are your most significant needs? Who do you value that you haven't been in contact with for months? It's time to make a few dates in your calendar and a few calls to people who can fill your network holes. And don't do this for the sole purpose of finding encouraging, positive people—unless you're ready to support them in the same way that you want to be supported. It's been said that many go out to find a friend and find no one, while others go out to be a good friend and find friends everywhere. When you make a conscious effort to nurture positive bonds within your relationships—both

“Happiness is like a stampede.  
. . . Each happy friend boosts  
your own chances of being  
happy by 9 percent. Having  
grumpy friends decreases it by  
about 7 percent.”

—Nicholas Christakis &  
James Fowler

on and off the job—you can expect to see your *net work* for you. If you believe people are the biggest resource you can have, then make sure it shows in your calendar—and your actions.

## Networking with Integrity Makes Relationships Work

Good relationships are built on the premise that we give as much as we receive. Don't expect to have others be part of your vital village

“Other things being equal, people do business with people they like. Other things not being equal, people still do business with people they like.”

—Mark McCormack

unless you are willing to be a contributor to theirs. American founding father and patriot Benjamin Franklin confided in his autobiography, “Always ask people for favors. People will ask you to return them. That is

how one painstakingly constructs free exchange, which is the basis of all public and private business—one polite request at a time.” Franklin was a precocious young inventor and networker and—given his place in history—clearly knew a thing or two about fostering rich relationships with others. He put his words into practice when, as a young man, he asked to borrow a book from the governor of Pennsylvania. Franklin credited that interaction as the networking request that truly launched his publishing career.

The value that lies in this kind of exchange is no different today. The nature of change is fluid and dynamic, and it requires the synergy that comes from extended associations and strategic alliances both in and outside your organization. It's the master bridge builders that have the most influence. They make relationships work by taking the time to share information, give and ask for feedback, and compliment those who deserve recognition.

Ogilvy Public Relations Worldwide CEO Pam Alexander knows the importance of making her network work: “The new economy is not just about the exchange of information; it's about the exchange of relationships. If you can cultivate relationships with thought leaders in your industry, you can reach their network of

relationships. To build trust, invest in your relationships constantly. . . . By nurturing your personal relationships to help people excel, you build exponential impact in the marketplace. Ultimately, their success is your success.”

“One of our people was just promoted to run marketing for a major division. Somebody said, ‘We lost Lee.’ We didn’t lose Lee. We gained a whole division.”

—John Patrick

Sales are similarly built on the development of such connections. Salespeople know the importance of putting deposits into a relationship bank account; while such deposits do not guarantee a sale, the bridges they establish provide the builder with the opportunity to be heard. Remember the following: *The less authority you have, the more you are in sales, and your influence is a function of how well you can sell your ideas and build commitment to a shared goal.* In an age of cross-functional teams and partnership collaboration, bridge building and relationships are more important than ever before.

Of course, people don’t need to report to you to be valued members of your network. By helping your colleagues develop and grasp new opportunities when they are ready, you will be remembered and valued for a lifetime. As a result, your strategic alumni can be one of your biggest assets in building support.

Don’t limit your connections solely to those with whom you work. Today’s best catalysts are hub people, those who use the power of empowered networks. They know how to find, connect with, and utilize loose networks of the people whose involvement they need to make things happen. They are connected—digitally and personally. It’s not enough to merely be a connector. Catalysts aren’t above helping where they are needed, no matter how insignificant the role. That kind of support forges strong emotional bonds with people on the ground and builds an extensive trust account that comes in handy in the midst of changing times.

“What do catalysts do? They accelerate growth and effectiveness by increasing the trust and connectivity of the networks they inhabit.”

—John Robb, Global Guerillas Blog

Who you come to know does make a vital difference. It always has, and it always will. So be known for networking with integrity. Give as much as—if not more than—you receive, and you will have valid reasons to be optimistic. So ask yourself (and follow through on it!): What can you do this week to extend your relationships and make a few more positive deposits in the ones you have?

### **Truth #46: Renew and Revitalize Your Most Valued Relationships**

Now, before you start adding new people, don't forget to keep the friends and loved ones you already have. A manager from India made an observation at one of my presentations about relationships that has stuck with me for years. He confided, "In India, marriages are arranged. We start without love and know we must work to bring love to our life together. In the West, you work hard looking for love, and when you find it, you assume that it will last without having to work. Love takes work to keep the flame alive wherever you live."

This man's assertion doesn't just apply to the bond between spouses. His insight speaks to the need of not just finding relationships initially, but recognizing the need to renew and revitalize those valued connections as well. Relationships of any kind take work to initiate and maintain. You can't simply put esteemed associations on autopilot and expect them to continue to grow without any effort. Most won't burn out; they'll rust out for want of attention.

So keep cultivating the unexpected in the relationships that matter most to you. Whether you do so through word or action, find ways to show caring and support. Remember: Relationships are like deposit systems; you can't expect to make withdrawals unless you make a few deposits.

"There is only one thing better than making a new friend, and that is keeping an old one."

—Elmer Letterman

I know a father who was an assistant coach for his son's baseball team. To the team, his signature baseball cap was the good luck charm that

carried them into their playoff winning streak. When his company requested him to make a trip to New York for a critical customer presentation, he knew that it would cause him to miss a pivotal game. He came up with an acceptable compromise that required him to take a picture of him wearing his lucky hat at the time the game was scheduled to begin.

He had anticipated no problem in doing this, but as the designated time approached, his meeting was still tied up in tight negotiations. Overcoming his own reluctance and concern about how his colleagues would react to his request, he stopped the proceedings, explained the situation, and asked the customer to take a picture of him next to the clock. He kept his promise, his son's team won the game, and his client was so touched by his commitment to his son that the negotiations ended favorably and quickly. Making relationships count makes for some memorable experiences—and some equally strong bonds.

Be the kind of friend or associate who catches others being effective. Don't just think it; express it. Take the time to recognize and formally acknowledge people who make a difference. Be ready to give more than your share of credit to others and take more than your share of

"Two are better than one. . . .  
If one falls down, his friend  
can help him up."

—Ecclesiastes 4:9–10

blame. As successful businessperson Mary Kay used to say, "Imagine every person you meet has on his chest a sign that reads, 'Make Me Feel Important.'" Now, act that way!

Listening is one of the most important relationship skills that you can develop. Of course, it's easy to listen when you are dating someone new or trying to impress a potential customer. The trick, however, is to learn how to listen anew to those you already value and know well. Don't lock others into who they have been. Listen with fresh ears to your established customers and to the seniors, boomers, Gen Xers, and millennials who inhabit your life. Show more interest and make more effort toward being an encouraging listener committed to helping them become what they can be. Never limit yourself to the digital connections available through

social networking. Nothing beats a call or a face-to-face coffee break to get caught up and replenish your relationship account.

## Use Relationships as an Optimism Advantage

“We are all tied together in a single garment of destiny, caught in an inescapable network of mutuality. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly. . . . I can never be all that I ought to be until you are all you ought to be. And you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be.”

—Martin Luther King Jr.

Whoever you bring into your network, remember to pick people who believe in you. When you do, you will soon find that you believe more in yourself.

Your positive network makes for the final wild card in your deck. Play it, and you'll have more of the optimism you need to make your life's journey worth living—and that's one heck of an optimism advantage!



# How to Become Optimistic in Life . . . By Really Trying

*“Life is what we make it. Always has been, always will be.”*

—Grandma Moses

**Y**our future optimism depends on many things, but it mostly depends on *you*. There isn’t one particular silver bullet that will make you the practical optimist you want to become. Someone who exhibits excellence in action isn’t just behaving this way after reading a book on the topic and trying it for the first time. Serious learners cultivate personal change, and mastery is the result of sustained dedication and focused application.

Change is about personal accountability and choices. So what are you going to do

“At a certain point there are more yesterdays than tomorrows. So, I plan on spending all my tomorrows very carefully and appreciating every one of them.”

—Chris Gardner

with the insights you learned here to make the optimism advantage work for you? Here's a summary of some of the key points about optimism for you to consider:

- No matter what has happened to you, you're not a victim. You are a survivor with choices about how you can respond to the hands you've been dealt.
- Have a purpose worthy of your commitment to make your choices and actions meaningful and compelling.
- Choose lifelong learning as your ticket to renewal and revitalized opportunity at any age.
- Take care of your body and maintain good health habits, and your body will do a better job of taking care of you.
- Cultivate a bias for action that gets you out of the rearview mirror and into making a move.
- Turn adversity into opportunities by replacing your negative beliefs and refocusing your feelings, attitudes, and actions.
- Become more grateful by being thankful for what life gives you and by never being thrown by less.
- Care enough about yourself to confront your own mistakes in the same way that you would challenge a loved one to learn from their errors.
- Catch yourself being effective daily instead of depending on the approval of others.
- Choose to enjoy life's simple pleasures to impact your attitude and rekindle your optimism.
- Take your life and work seriously and yourself lightly; your sense of humor can become an ever-present stress breaker that you control.
- And finally, create your own village of support and encouragement by building and renewing an optimistic network that works for you!

## You Want More Than Insights—You Want Changes That Last

Whenever you read a book or come back from a conference or training experience, your friends, family, and coworkers expect you to act bizarre for at least three days. They're anticipating a list of New Year's resolution-type goals, a renewed sense of enthusiasm, and a plethora of changes to take place. They're betting, however, on these changes being short-term. They don't expect them to last, and they assume that you'll revert back to the same old way you've always done things. They've seen it before, and they are sure they'll see it again.

"The biggest person standing in your way is you. Others can stop you temporarily—you are the only one who can do it permanently."

—Zig Ziglar

It's not surprising that such expectations exist; research suggests that relapse rates—and our tendency to return to old habits—can be as high as 90 percent. Even when you value the content you've learned, the scorecard could read: "Happy Face Testimonials 10 vs. Life Changes 1."

Don't let that happen with this book. Don't put this on a shelf until you've isolated your *Keepers*—the key points that you've found most valuable and worth applying in your daily life.

Find the learning nuggets that are critical to ensuring your personal change. Most notes you take at training events usually go in files or piles; even the books you read often end up collecting dust on a shelf somewhere. Unfortunately, 85 to 95 percent of this material will never be looked at or read again. What we know about learning and change is very clear: Without focused review, you're unlikely to retain the information or change your habits.

At the beginning of this book, I asked you to devour the content. I suggested that you underline or highlight and make notes in the margins. Some of the truths you skimmed and left unmarked because they didn't connect with your life experience. That's fine; every person is different, and some insights won't be relevant unless your

“If you don’t know where you are going, you’ll end up somewhere else.”

—Yogi Berra

life presents a need to learn them. Some of the things that you highlighted are things you already do—insights you’ve already mastered. While that’s

affirming, it’s important to move ahead to isolate additional changes you need to make now.

## Truth #47: Making Changes That Last Is All about Focusing Your Goals

So while the experience of reading this book is still fresh, take time to review the material you highlighted and the notes you wrote in the margin. If an insight is a *Keeper* you want—and need—to focus on to improve, use a blank piece of paper to capture a phrase that will consistently remind you of that insight. Keep your entries short and legible without long explanations, and be sure to indicate the page of the insight’s source for review. Don’t write down things you already do; just record those you believe are worth remembering.

No matter how many pieces of information you isolate, you’ll want to identify no more than three content *Keepers* to begin working on now. The more goals you give yourself at any given time, the less likely you are to do any of them well. By limiting your focus to only three goals, you’ll probably see progress where it counts. Once you hone in on the material that resonates most, you’ll want to translate those insights into personal development goals to guide your focus. Make these objectives as specific as possible. It’s best if you can

“The most difficult shift is moving passion into practice. We all need an action initiative. Stop the head nodding and do something! Focused action beats brilliance.”

—Mark Sanborn

actually keep score or show evidence of progress.

But how do you decide which goals to seek first? Start by focusing on the ones that help fulfill your mission or purpose *and* that you’re most motivated to change. If you still have trouble, give precedence

to the goals that will have the most impact on your life on *and* off the job. If you're going to make personal changes, make it worth the effort for you and your organization.

"By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail."  
—Benjamin Franklin

Don't worry about making your list perfect. You don't need flawless goals; you just need to trust your ability to concentrate on bringing the ones you've picked to fruition. You can change your goals, of course, but having a clear focus worthy of your efforts will go a long way toward getting you moving.

**Translate your top three content KEEPERS into three specific goals:**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

## Use Your Calendar to Support Change

Use your calendar as a tool to remind yourself of your commitments. After all, it's important to keep your personal goals visible and at the top of your mind once you've taken the vital step of making them. And similar to your personal dates and professional meetings, *there is no better reminder than your existing calendar system*, because you have to process calendar changes daily. Having your goals visible makes it much easier to keep your focus.

No matter what system you decide to employ, make your three key goals immediately noticeable every time you open your calendar. Some use a small Post-It to move their goals around on a daily basis; others make them evident in computerized to-do lists or online calendars. But wherever you put them, make yourself reread your three goals each day before you look at your daily schedule. This will put you on your way to *claiming your optimism advantage and making changes that last!*

"Most people don't need to be taught. They need to be reminded."  
—C. S. Lewis

Be a pride builder for you—and your team. Jon R. Katzenbach—author of *Why Pride Matters More Than Money*—knows what it takes to build pride in your team: “Always have your compass set on pride. . . . Where motivation is concerned, the journey is more important than the destination. It is more important for people to be proud of what they are doing every day than it is for them to be proud of reaching a major goal. That’s why it’s crucial to celebrate the ‘steps’ as much as the ‘landings.’ The best pride builders are masters at spotting and recognizing the small achievements that will instill pride in their people.”

Although money is often short in difficult times, nothing should stop you from developing pride and confidence in yourself and your teammates. Major victories may be few and far between, but daily heroic efforts are seldom noticed—and need to be. As you read in the chapter on catching yourself being effective, don’t forget to end your day by recording one successful step you’ve taken to further your targeted goals. When you record—and see—your own progress, you are more likely to create momentum for change. Don’t forget to use your time with others to acknowledge what’s working. Take time to let everyone feel the pride of progress!

## Move from Focus to Stepped Progress

Although it’s vital for you to have a clear change focus, it’s also necessary to build in realistic, stepped progress. Take a hard look at the steps you need to take to achieve your goals. You learned to drive because it was a long way to walk, but you didn’t start driving at the Indianapolis 500. You started in a deserted parking lot. Do the same with any goal-driven change; begin with small, easy steps

“Start by doing what’s necessary, then what’s possible and suddenly you are doing the impossible.”

—St. Francis of Assisi

to cultivate your successes without risking major failure. Think in terms of steps, not miles. With this in mind, establish your first step for each targeted goal. Pick a short-term

target date for accomplishing those first steps. Remember, these don't have to be big steps. Big steps create unnecessary obstacles. You don't want to intimidate yourself or give

yourself any excuses to procrastinate further. You want something you will actually *do* soon—and successfully.

For example, to develop a habit of regular exercise, one woman made the commitment to get into her jogging suit every morning—whether she ran or not. On most mornings, getting dressed was enough to get her out the door and around the block. By having a minimum commitment daily, she was soon chalking up the miles.

Many swear by the insights provided by FlyLady, a self-proclaimed home executive turned clutter consultant. One inertia-breaking suggestion she has made is something she calls the “5-minute Room Rescue.” You set a kitchen timer for five minutes and then rush to the dirtiest room in your house—the one no guests ever see. As the timer ticks down, you start clearing a path. When it buzzes, you can stop tidying up with a clear conscience. You get started by scaling down the goal to just five minutes. FlyLady realizes that changes seldom arrive in big, miraculous undertakings; they come in small steps. And you don't have to limit her kitchen timer approach to clearing a path in your house; you can use it to make progress on *any* of your goals. Once you've invested five minutes of your time, you may find yourself working longer. Doing more than you planned makes you more likely to take your next step. While expansive, long-term goals may sound impressive, it's better to give yourself the right to break those enduring goals into a number of smaller victories that you actually accomplish.

Former all-star catcher Mike Piazza was known for his long-ball hitting, but he learned the importance of *trying easy*. He warned: “The minute you think about hitting a home run is when you *don't*. . . . Sometimes you

“Habit is habit, and not to be flung out of the window by any man, but to be coaxed down the stairs one step at a time.”

—Mark Twain

“We cannot do everything at once, but we can do something at once.”

—Calvin Coolidge

over try. You have to ‘try easy,’ not ‘try hard.’ Hitting a home run is an effortless exertion of everything coming together and meeting at one energy. It comes from being focused, and not forced.” So take a cue from Piazza and focus on realistic goals; don’t attempt to force unrealistic change. Use stepped progress, and you’ll soon be *changing easy*.

## Involve Your Buddies, Bosses, and Cheerleaders

It’s nice to have a focus, a reminder system, and identified first steps, but every effort for personal change comes much more easily with a good dose of support from your partners, buddies, bosses, and resident cheerleaders. It’s easier to cheat when it comes to privately held goals, because no one knows you are working on them. Making early commitments to your energy boosters will increase your likelihood for personal change.

You already know your energy boosters. They’re the people who encourage you, who love to celebrate your accomplishments with you. Go beyond telling them about your goals; ask for their help in achieving them. Let them know that you expect change to be difficult, and ask them to alert you if they see your old habits creep back into your life. Arrange to take them with you to celebrate pre-established milestones in your change effort. Every once in a while, enjoy a standing ovation from your friends and colleagues.

*Now, who would you add to your energy boosting support group?* Depending on your goals, don’t be afraid to consider asking one from your personal life and another from your professional network.

## Build Your Support Group for Your Changes

Who will best encourage and support your change efforts?

Identify Names:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_



## Truth #48: Use the Rehearsal Studio of Your Mind to Support Positive Change

Another constructive component for reaching your objectives is practicing visual imagery. Even if you can't use

your new skills to make progress every day, you can begin using the rehearsal studio of your mind to reinforce your desired changes. You've heard people say, "Imagine that!" Using your imagination positively in mental rehearsal can and does make change easier. You can start visualizing by focusing beyond your goal and distinctly imagining how you will think and feel as the new *optimistic* you in specific situations. Expand the image in your mind to cement the positive benefits and the likely opportunities it will create. Imagining colleagues responding positively to your optimistic comments about new strategic initiatives can be rewarding in and of itself.

Golf great Phil Mickelson's coach Dave Pelz provides a valuable warning when it comes to effective practice: "Having the right device but using it incorrectly is worse than no practice. Practice does not make perfect; practice makes permanent. And if you practice as poorly as most golfers do, then you will be a permanent bad golfer." In short, *whether you are visualizing or actually engaging in your practice, learn it fully and correctly from the beginning.*

To develop habits that are worth keeping, you can learn best from those you respect. If you know others who have effectively made similar changes, try borrowing images from your observations about how those changes have worked for them. Never stand in awe of others; instead, use their examples to model and inspire your own growth. After all, if they can improve, so can you.

You can also use your visualization skills to imagine how you would positively handle obstacles you may face. Identify likely problems, develop a positive strategy to handle them, and then imagine yourself successfully applying that strategy. Since you are writing the script and get to do as many retakes as you desire, *never leave*

"The man who has no imagination has no wings."

—Muhammad Ali

"If you don't control your mind, somebody else will."

—John Alston

“I discovered one more limitation that would last only as long as I let it.”

—W. Mitchell

*a visualization practice session without imagining handling the situation well.* You want to build confidence to overcome obstacles, not fear of facing them.

## Bounce Back Quickly from Lapses with Resolve and Determination

Don't forget to treat yourself well on the downside of your change journey. Along with your progress will undoubtedly come occasional setbacks and errors. Bad habits and negative beliefs often don't give up without a fight. Remember that you aren't experiencing these impediments because you're a slow learner, but because you're a serious student. Lapses are a part of any significant change, and it's your responses to those lapses that count most. Your job is to turn momentary failures into opportunities to bounce back even stronger.

Legendary actress Mary Pickford wrote this timeless advice: “Today is a new day. You will get out of it just what you put into it. If you have made mistakes, even serious mistakes, there is always another chance for you. And supposing you have tried and failed again and again, you may have a fresh start any moment you choose, for this thing that we call ‘failure’ is not the falling down, but the staying down.” Merely getting back up quickly is a huge step in moving beyond these obstacles.

If you need motivation, think back to all the times in your life that you've turned setbacks into stepping stones. It's easy to forget how some of the most positive outcomes in your life came about as the result of some of your most difficult experiences. Since optimism comes from a track record of recovering from defeat and finding new

“Many of life's failures are people who did not realize how close they were to success when they gave up.”

—Thomas Edison

ways to win, you must keep reminding yourself that you are a resilient survivor. Victims look for someone or something to blame; optimists keep seeking out the silver linings, new

pathways, and open doors that become visible when you really look for them. While learning can often be three steps forward and two steps back, progress builds as we keep climbing that mountain. Never overlook the importance of confronting your own mistakes the way you would talk to someone you care about and are trying to encourage. You've survived tough setbacks before; you will again.

While it's essential to keep past mistakes and lapses from stopping you, it's equally vital to avoid overburdening yourself with unrealistic future expectations. General manager of the NBA's Orlando Magic Pat Williams doesn't let the past—or the future—interfere with his desire to make a difference in the present. Williams writes: “We all have three blocks of time in our life: yesterday, today and tomorrow. I think more problems with worry are caused by focusing on yesterday and tomorrow. We can learn from yesterday, but we must not get stuck living back there. The other block of time is tomorrow. Too many people worry about what might happen ten years from now, and it stops them from doing things today.”

Take Williams's words to heart, and never let the weight of your future expectations discourage your progress today. Don't carry the full burden of your future now; get on with the challenge of making progress in inventing your future one day at a time.

“If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost; that is where they should be. Now, put the foundations under them.”

—Henry David Thoreau

## **Truth #49: Nurture New Learning in Support of Your Change Goals**

Of course, there's more to sustaining change than simply having a focus. You must document your progress in turning your setbacks into stepping stones for personal transformation. Every new change you make requires additional learning to deepen your understanding,

“I’m simply suggesting that whether you stay with this company or go to another one, the person who sees a career as one of perpetual investment in education stands a lot better chance of surviving in today’s world. Education is the only defense.”

—Tom Peters

and feel refreshed; it doesn’t mean you won’t need another one tomorrow. Use your goals to bring focus to your commitment to lifelong learning. Look online or in bookstores for material that will allow you to support the changes you are trying to make. I’ve included a list of resources at the end of this book for that very reason; you want the best mental ammunition available. But don’t merely read these books and articles; really investigate them with an eye toward isolating more insights worth memorizing.

People today seem increasingly obsessed with the prospect of finding something *new*. They want the newest book on optimism or the hottest seminar on corporate cultures. But novelty can be a shallow temptress, where substance gives way to flashy packaging

“I’ve been guided in my work by the notion that older is often better. If an idea has been around for a few thousand years, it’s been submitted to many tests—which is a good indicator that it might have some real merit. We’re fixated on newness, which often misleads us into elevating novelty over substance.”

—Debahish Chatterjee

fortify your beliefs, and strengthen your emerging habits and attitudes.

You’ve had years of experiences to cement old habits; accordingly, you need more than a single lesson or book to develop the depth and ideas needed to sustain your desired changes. It’s the same as being able to take just one shower

and feel refreshed; it doesn’t mean you won’t need another one tomorrow. Use your goals to bring focus to your commitment to lifelong learning. Look online or in bookstores for material that will allow you to support the changes you are trying to make. I’ve included a list of resources at the end of this book for that very reason; you want the best mental ammunition available. But don’t merely read these books and articles; really investigate them with an eye toward isolating more insights worth memorizing.

People today seem increasingly obsessed with the prospect of finding something *new*. They want the newest book on optimism or the hottest seminar on corporate cultures. But novelty can be a shallow temptress, where substance gives way to flashy packaging and creative PR. Yes, some new perspectives will produce tangible insights, and the results are there to prove it. But throw out established truths and wisdom with the greatest of caution.

Even the most time-honored wisdom, however, must be refreshed and reformulated for every new age. New examples must be found to prove enduring truths; new stories worthy of legend need to be

told to show how that wisdom is still working. However, the longer we live, the more we find that even some of the newest and boldest innovations remind us of ideas that have been heard or tried before. The Bible, for example, has been providing fresh yet lasting insights for centuries.

Nineteenth-century authors and orators on positive thinking also ring true to many of today's challenges. Fellow speaker and historian of positive thinking Danny Cox has said: "Open a book by Elbert Hubbard, Samuel Smiles or Orison Swett Marden and read one page. I dare you not to be touched by the enduring insights you read." One of Marden's books from 1907 was titled *The Optimistic Life* and is still available in paperback. Truth has a way of coming back in a new wardrobe. Instead of asking what have you learned that is new, ask yourself what truths are still worth affirming that can accelerate your progress.

Share these timeless lessons with others. Although you may have resented some of your parents' lectures when you were a youth, you often find yourself sharing your version with your own children. Those messages are laced with timeless certainty.

"Don't avoid the clichés. They are clichés because they work."

—George Lucas

Clichés have power when they become shared wisdom that is valued by all members of your team; they become treasured statements that anchor your organization's culture. They don't have to be explained, just repeated when necessary. What are your favorite clichés or sayings that unlock wisdom you want to remember—and can't afford to forget?

You don't just want to collect great quotes and catchy phrases; you want them in the front of your mind and ready when you need them. If you like listening to CDs, your iPod, or another MP3 player, try recording your own collection for playback. Start by recording your *Keepers* from this and other valued books. To make listening more enjoyable, break up the quotes and content by inserting one of your favorite inspirational songs. By listening to your *Keeper* messages weekly—as you commute or take a break—you'll soon memorize them and make them available whenever you need to motivate yourself or others.

If you want more material, you don't have to go far to find a fresh motivational shower with an optimistic focus. If you are enjoying this book, you will benefit by visiting the *Optimism Advantage Blog* at <http://www.optimismadvantage.com>. You'll find timely quotes, informative videos, stimulating commentary, and even an occasional humor break to keep you learning and laughing your way to an optimistic attitude. Those who visit the site will also be invited to share their comments and discuss what works in sustaining their own optimism advantage.

If taking time to read a blog doesn't fit your lifestyle or schedule, try signing up for *Dr. Paulson's Daily Dose of Optimism* at <http://www.terrypaulson.com/optimismdaily>. This will allow you to receive an inspirational message that will support your optimism advantage every day for a year. The short, free message will arrive every day at the same time you signed up to receive it. You don't have to read it every day, but it will always be there when you need an inner upper.

## Try a Dose of Inspiring Stories of Courage and Change

Whether it's reading the latest version of *Chicken Soup* for any particular soul or a current best seller about an admirable recovery

"Technology is the campfire around which we tell our stories."

—Laurie Anderson

or deed, a good dose of inspirational stories can do wonders to boost your own courage and motivation. Such stories remind us of what is possible. Finding

such inspiring mental ammunition is easier than ever. Former CNN daytime anchor Daryn Kagan lost her contract in January 2006, an event that allowed her to reinvent herself and her career. Kagan took her newly discovered free time and developed a web site devoted to telling inspirational stories. Visit and you'll find a centerpiece story of the day, as well as an archive of dozens more. Her mission is to "show the world what's possible," and her book *What's Possible* does just that. Reading inspirational stories has a very positive by-product; it's really hard to keep having a bad day once you've heard stories of others who have turned significant hardships around.

William Ian Miller, author of *The Mystery of Courage*, talked about the importance of using stories to inspire courage: “Read stories of courage. They make you wonder how you would have done compared with the hero of the tale. . . . You get very humble. You start self-querying and fantasizing about your own response, your own reaction. As the psalmist says, ‘You become what you behold.’ That’s why stories of courage take you over. They are such cries of the heart.”

Courage is a character trait we aspire to possess, but how we can foster it remains somewhat elusive. For centuries, leaders have used tales of legendary courage to motivate others to emulate heroes and heroines. In a world preoccupied with measurement systems, processes, and best practices, we shouldn’t forget the power that stories have to energize and inspire. Don’t just read them; look for stories being acted out in your life and the lives of others you know. What characters you know have exhibited courage and fortitude in overcoming adversity? Who had the courage to confront unethical behavior and challenge others to do what was right *before* it resulted in headlines? Who was bold enough to champion change before it was popular? If you want more courage, find a few more stories worth sharing.

## Don’t Forget to Reward and Celebrate Your Own Progress

Most people usually forget to take the time to enjoy their own progress. After all, you don’t often lose sleep thinking about how great your day was. But it’s time we make these efforts pay off in a tangible way, and your self-reward options are limited only by your imagination. Go to a movie or sporting event, buy a brand new book or movie, or take time to call a friend or colleague whose conversation and company you enjoy. Only you know which rewards you enjoy the most. Many may very well be some of the simple pleasures you isolated earlier. When you earn them, you will enjoy them even more.

“The nice thing about teamwork is that you always have others on your side.”

—Margaret Carty

“The best part of waking  
up . . . is not the coffee.”

—Frank Bucaro

If you call a friend as a reward for progress, tell them why you’re getting in touch: “I want you to know that calling

you is my reward!” They will probably reply, “A reward for what?”—which will give you the opportunity to share your accomplishments. Not only will they encourage your progress; they are apt to be quite flattered that you have chosen *their* company as a way to treat yourself. Expect a heavy dose of reinforcement for your growth in becoming more optimistic. Remember that optimism is contagious, and this is one of the best ways to spread it among those you value most.

The best part of life isn’t the coffee you drink; it’s enjoying the company of those with whom you are drinking the coffee. Don’t just compensate yourself for progress; let your support team join in the fun. And since the journey to change is never fully complete, don’t wait until you have arrived to celebrate early successes along the way. Take time to commemorate your achievements with your energizing buddies, bosses, and cheerleaders who are there to support your change goals. People always love an excuse to party, and your progress will give everyone all the excuses they need.

Fellow speaker and former radio reporter Suzie Humphreys once told her friends that she deserved her own surprise party. They all assumed that she was kidding—until each one received an invitation that had instructions for where to park so she wouldn’t be suspicious, who would take her for dinner so she would be out of the home, and when to arrive so that no one would spoil the surprise. She even instructed her guests that instead of buying “trashy trinkets,” they should pool all their money to get one nice gift. When Humphreys entered her home at the designated time, her friends all jumped out and yelled, “Surprise!” She replied with a knowing smile, “You guys! I am so surprised! You shouldn’t have!”

Don’t be afraid to let *your* imagination guide your celebrations with your encouragers. Whether it’s your own surprise party, a simple lunch, shared coffee, doughnuts, or tofu substitutes, once you’ve set your date to celebrate, fun is on the way. Make sure you share the obstacles you’ve had to overcome and thank those attending for their part in making progress possible. If your change goals involve your work, make one of



your support group choices your boss. If your goals have a potential impact on your organization and team, you want your boss to know what they are. By making a clear statement of what you have learned, you force your boss

to listen anew to how you're changing, how it can make a difference, and what you need in the way of his or her support.

Whole Foods CEO John Mackey has established a unique way to end his meetings with encouragement: "People nurse petty grievances in day-to-day life. That's why we've been ending meetings with voluntary appreciations for 20 years. It's a chance for people to say nice things about one another, and the appreciations tend to break down barriers." Building a habit of ending a meeting with shared statements of appreciation may seem forced, but it works in building a habit worth continuing. Don't expect a torrent of compliments the first time you try this; some may think it's corny and refuse to participate. But stick with it. With volunteer appreciation on your meeting agenda, you'll have all the material you need to positively gossip your way to a strong culture of pride. Add it to your agenda this week, and watch it make a difference for any team.

"Success is best when it is shared. You will be left with an empty feeling if you hit the finish line alone."

—Howard Schultz, Starbucks  
CEO

## **Truth #50: Never Give Up on Becoming the Optimistic Person You Want to Be**

Change rarely comes in the form of instant gratification. However, if you're like most people, you want success yesterday. Television has exposed most of us to more than a million incredibly unrealistic 30- to 60-second solutions. These ads teach us to expect immediate rewards and results, but life teaches us that real solutions take work, persistence,

"The reason a lot of people do not recognize opportunity is because it usually goes around wearing overalls looking like hard work."

—Thomas A. Edison

and time. As has been said, “Motivation is when your dreams put on work clothes.” This is not a time to slack on claiming your optimism advantage; it’s the time to push for the summit on the horizon.

If your changes are worth making, it’s worth persevering to find a way to achieve them. Norman Vincent Peale had a plaque on his

“Don’t give up at half-time.  
Concentrate on winning the  
second half.”

—Coach Bear Bryant

wall that read: “Anybody Can Quit!” But you’re not just anybody, and it’s always too soon for you to quit if your mission and goals are important enough.

Be patient but persistent. You don’t know which day and which step will put your goals within reach. Imagine that you’re making the blows to break through a stone wall to reach your goals. Social reformer Jacob Riis described a century ago what it takes to make change work: “When nothing seems to help, I go and look at a stonecutter hammering away at his rock, perhaps a hundred times without as much as a crack showing in it. Yet at the hundred and first blow it will split in two, and I know it was not that blow that did it, but all that had gone before.”

When it seems like you’re not making progress, keep your perspective. Your next blow for change may produce the breakthrough you are looking for.

Marathoners and Tour de France racers will tell you that a race’s hardest parts—the uphill stages—are where victories are truly assured. When recessions end, when the roads level off, and when the world seems full of promise, your position in the great game of life will depend on how skillfully you managed the tough times—how you optimistically persisted to make change work.

## Make Every Day Count to Become the Best You Can Be

Woody Allen has famously claimed, “Half of life is showing up!” The other half, of course, is doing something with the day once you *do* show up. In fact, do something *positive* every day. Although it doesn’t have to be a big thing, you must do more than show up. Life is best taken one day at a time, no matter what the change. The most

important changes have to be earned and earned again every single day. Don't waste any of them.

Making progress isn't about comparing yourself to others or being limited to what has worked in the past; it's about working to be the best you can be today. The natural tendency is to compare

yourself to others you respect. In some areas, they will easily outperform you. In your strengths, you may very well outperform them. But if you keep judging yourself based on the best in every area, you will always feel discouraged. Trophies may have one day motivated your performance, but most now gather dust on mantels or in attic boxes. As an optimist, get busy controlling what you can where it counts.

Popular leadership author Jim Collins makes a case for practical flexibility: "Applying persistence not to an idea but to a company, and willingly changing the ideas until you find some combination that works, is an enormously powerful way to go about an entrepreneurial adventure." An organization that attempts to deliver an inflexible vision—or a person who confidently persists to achieve a fixed goal—may *sound* good, but these are seldom the approaches to success that work in a rapidly changing world. If they fail to achieve their vision or goal, does it mean that they were not focused enough, didn't want it badly enough, or maybe—just maybe—they were in the wrong game?

Persistence—in both organizations and individuals—is an asset only when it adds a key component—a flexible destination. As we have learned, no matter how nice the horse, if the horse is dead—you better get off it. As an organization, persist in riding any horse that will keep you moving to profitable and meaningful destinations. As an indi-

"On our track to success, we have to fight the tendency to look at others and see how far they've come. The only thing that counts is how we use the potential we possess and that we run our race to the best of our abilities."

—Dennis Waitley and  
Reni L. Witt

"There is no such thing in anyone's life as an unimportant day."

—Alexander Woollcott

“Consult not your fears but your hopes and dreams. Think not about your frustrations, but about your unfulfilled potential. Concern yourself not with what you tried and failed in, but with what is still possible for you to do.”

—Pope John XXIII

vidual, don't fall in love with one goal. Instead, fall in love with doing whatever it takes to advance your journey and claim your optimism advantage. Be flexible, realistic, and practical. Focus on your mission, your goals, your best, your choices, and your progress. Use every day, because every day matters.

Let me end with the prayer we began with:

*“God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.”*

—Reinhold Niebuhr

Let it be so!

---

## RESOURCES

---

- Aspinwall, Lisa and Staudinger, Ursula. *A Psychology of Human Strengths*, American Psychological Association, 2002.
- Bender, Peter Urs. *Leadership from Within*, Stoddart, Third Edition, 1997.
- Benjamin, Harold. *From Victim to Victor for Cancer Patients and Their Families*, Penguin, 1995.
- Blanchard, Ken, Hutson, Don and Willis, Ethan. *The One Minute Entrepreneur*, Broadway Business, 2008.
- Briscoe, Simon and Aldersey-Williams, Hugh. *Panicology*, Skyhorse Publishing, 2009.
- Buckingham, Marcus and Clifton, Donald. *Now, Discover Your Strengths*, Free Press, 2001.
- Burns, David. *Feeling Good*, Quill/Harper-Collins Publishers, 2000.
- Cameron, Kim S. *Making the Impossible Possible*, Berrett Koehler, 2006.
- Clance, Pauline. *The Impostor Phenomenon: Overcoming the Fear that Haunts Your Success*, Peachtree Publishers, 1985.
- Cosby, Bill and Poussaint, Alvin. *Come on People: On the Path from Victims to Victors*, Thomas Nelson, 2007.
- Cousins, Norman. *The Healing Heart: Antidotes to Panic and Helplessness*, Avon Books, 1984.
- Diener, Ed and Diswas-Diener, Robert. *Happiness: Unlocking the Mysteries of Psychological Wealth*, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., Blackwell, 2008.
- Fast, Julie and Preston, John. *Get It Done When You're Depressed*, Alpha Books, 2008.
- Frankl, Viktor. *Man's Search for Meaning*, Beacon Press, 2006.
- Fredrickson, Barbara. *Positivity: Top-Notch Research Reveals the 3 to 1 Ratio That Will Change Your Life*, Three Rivers Press, 2009.
- Gilbert, Dan. *Stumbling on Happiness*, Vintage, 2007.

- Greengard, Samuel. *AARP Crash Course in Finding the Work You Love: The Essential Guide to Reinventing Your Life*, AARP Books/Sterling, 2008.
- Jolley, Willie. *A Setback Is a Setup for a Comeback*, St. Martin's Press, 2000.
- Jolley, Willie. *Turn Setbacks into Greenbacks: 7 Secrets for Going Up in Down Times*, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2010.
- Kagen, Daryn. *What's Possible!* Meredith Books, 2008.
- Leahy, Robert. *The Worry Cure: Seven Steps to Stop Worry from Stopping You*, Three Rivers Press, 2006.
- Leider, Richard. *Something to Live For: Finding Your Way in the Second Half of Life*, Barrett-Koehler, 2008.
- Lucado, Max. *Fearless: Imagine Your Life without Fear*, Thomas Nelson, 2009.
- Lyubomirsky, Sonja. *The How of Happiness*, Penguin Press, 2008.
- Maddi, Salvatore and Khoshaba, Deborah. *Resilience at Work: How to Succeed No Matter What Life Throws at You*, AMACOM, 2005.
- Maurer, Robert. *One Small Step Can Change Your Life: The Kaizen Way*, Workman Publishing Company, 2004.
- McKibben, Bill. *Deep Economy: The Wealth of Communities and the Durable Future*, Times Books, 2007.
- Nielsen, Doug. *Take Life by the Helm: Proven Strategies for Gaining Control*, DNC Publishing, 2009.
- Miller, William Ian. *The Mystery of Courage*, Harvard University Press, 2002.
- Nolen-Hoeksema, Susan. *Women Who Think Too Much*. Henry Holt & Co., 2004.
- Norem, Julie. *The Positive Power of Negative Thinking: Using Defensive Pessimism to Harness Anxiety and Perform at Your Peak*, Perseus Books Group, 2002.
- Palmer, Parker. *Let Your Life Speak*, Jossey-Bass Publishers, 2000.
- Paulson, Terry. *They Shoot Managers Don't They?* Ten Speed Press, 1991.
- Paulson, Terry. *Leadership Truths One Story at a Time*, Amber Eagle Press, 2006.
- Paulson, Terry. *Making Humor Work*, Crisp Publications, 1989.
- Pollay, David. *Beware of Garbage Trucks: The Law of the Garbage Truck*, Sterling Publishing, 2010.
- Prager, Dennis. *Happiness Is a Serious Problem*, Regan Books, 1998.
- Putnam, Robert. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, Simon and Schuster, 2001.
- Reivich, Karen and Shatte, Andrew. *The Resilience Factor: 7 Keys to Finding Your Inner Strength and Overcoming Life's Hurdles*, Broadway, 2003.

- Sanborn, Mark. *You Don't Need a Title to Be a Leader*, Waterbrook Press, 2006.
- Seligman, Martin. *Authentic Happiness: Using the New Positive Psychology to Realize Your Potential for Lasting Fulfillment*, Free Press, 2004.
- Seligman, Martin. *Learned Optimism*, Vintage, 2006.
- Seligman, Martin. *The Optimistic Child: A Proven Program to Safeguard Children Against Depression and Build Lifelong Resilience*, Mariner Books, 2007.
- Seligman, Martin. *What You Can Change and What You Can't*, Vintage, 2007.
- Sykes, Charles. *50 Rules Kids Won't Learn in School*, St. Martin's Press, 2007.
- Thomas, Kenneth. *Intrinsic Motivation at Work: Building Energy and Commitment*, Barrett-Koehler Publishers, 2000.
- Tiberius, Valerie. *The Reflective Life: Living Wisely with Our Limits*. Oxford University Press, 2008.
- Williams, Mark, Teasdale, John, Segal, Zindel and Kabat-Zinn, Jon. *The Mindful Way through Depression*, The Guilford Press, 2007.
- Zinger, Jim. *Life Enrichment through Self Hypnosis*, Hypnovation Training Institute, 1998.

---

# INDEX

---

- Abrahams, Harold, 76  
Achievement. *See* Success  
Action  
    avoiding, 73–74  
    changing, 8–9  
    confidence and, 82  
    driving analogy, 74–75  
    feisty prototypers and, 79–81  
    health habits and, 66–68  
    initiation of, 125–126  
    perfection *versus*, 81–82  
    positioning of, 77–78  
Adult child movement, 26  
Adversity  
    beliefs reframing and, 97–98  
    causes, evaluating, 91–93  
    closure and, 95  
    distance/distraction from, 87–88  
    facing, 15–16  
    fact checking of, 90–91  
    faith's role against, 95–97  
    gifts from, 100–101  
    learning from, 98–100  
    overcoming, 187  
    self-talk and, 85–86  
    worry and, 94–95  
Albrecht, Karl, 172  
Alcoholics Anonymous, 9  
Alexander, Pam, 175  
Alfe, Kathleen, 108  
Ali, Muhammad, 187  
Allen, Woody, 196  
Alston, John, 187  
Anderson, Laurie, 192  
Angelou, Maya, 47, 135  
Appleton, Steve, 25–26  
Arden, Ron, 119  
*Atlas Shrugged* (Rand), 36  
Attitudes  
    changing, 8–9  
    exercise and, 68–69  
    humor's effects on, 158–160  
    mature, 107  
    pet's effects on, 146–148  
    simple pleasures and, 140–141  
    skills/opportunity with, 60–61  
Barker, Joel, 42  
Barrett, Colleen, 37  
Barrie, J. M., 64  
Barton, Bruce, 85  
Basler, Barbara, 168  
Beattie, Melody, 113  
Beecher, Henry Ward, 157  
Beliefs  
    “Joe Friday” test for, 89  
    consequences and, 86  
    reframing, 97–98  
Benjamin, Harold, 33, 143, 155  
Benjamin, Jeffrey Lawrence, 84  
Benoit, Bill, 124  
Berlin, Irving, 53  
Berne, Eric, 153  
Berra, Yogi, 81, 182  
Bezos, Jeff, 20  
Blanchard, Ken, 10–11, 72, 130  
Borge, Victor, 159  
Bowering, Eva, 96  
Boyle, Susan, 60–61  
Bradbury, Ray, 73



- Breathnach, Sarah, 104  
 Briscoe, Simon, 90  
*Britain's Got Talent*, 60–61  
 Brothers, Joyce, 107  
 Bryant, Bear, 196  
 Bucaro, Frank, 194  
 Buchwald, Art, 155  
 Buechner, Frederick, 46  
 Buettner, Dan, 49  
 Bulgard, Sarah, 94  
 Burns, George, 149
- Calendars, 183–184  
 Campbell, Ellen Langas, 129  
 Cancer Support Community, 33, 35, 155  
 Capra, Frank, 21  
 Career transitions, 60, 62  
 Carlzon, Jan, 136  
 Carty, Margaret, 193  
 Carver, Charles, 89  
 Cathcart, Jim, 99  
*Challenger* disaster, 98  
 Chaplin, Charlie, 151  
 Charleson, Ian, 76  
 Chatterjee, Debahish, 190  
 Child, Lee, 59–60  
 Christakis, Nicholas, 174  
 Cicero, 103  
 Cohen, Sheldon, 168  
 Collins, Jim, 18  
 Colonel Sanders, 64  
 Columbine High School, 48  
 Colvin, Geoff, 78  
 Community. *See also* Faith community  
   appreciation of, 143  
   contacts in, 4  
   gratitude and, 111–112  
   living without, 172  
   power of, 49, 111  
   secular, 50  
   service to, 110–111  
   support from, 169, 171  
 Complain game, 104–105  
 Compliments, self provided, 131–132  
 Confucius, 61, 120  
 Conley, Jeff, 166  
 Constructive thinking, 97–98  
 Contextual intelligence, 55  
 Coolidge, Calvin, 185  
 Cooper, Simon, 80  
 COPE Wilderness Workshops, 143–144
- Cosby, Bill, 17, 30, 157  
 Courage, 193  
 Cousins, Norman, 154, 156  
 Covey, Stephen R., 56, 84, 118  
 Cox, Danny, 191  
 Creativity, 158, 162–163  
 Criticism. *See also* Self-criticism  
   acceptance of, 119  
   positive-to-negative ratio, 130–131  
   unnecessary, 122  
 Cross, Ben, 76  
 Culture  
   changing, 105  
   humor and, 162  
   learning, 115–116, 124
- Depression  
   exercise and, 68  
   gender differences, 170  
   negative thoughts and, 84  
   T.V. news and, 27  
 Determination, 188–189  
 Diaz, Cameron, 108  
 Diet, 65–70  
 Disney, Walt, 55, 76  
 Disraeli, Benjamin, 136  
 Distance, gift of, 87–88  
 Distraction, gift of, 87–88  
 Dot.com bust, 18–19  
 Dotson, Maria, 42–43  
 Drucker, Peter, 135
- e-Commerce, 20  
 Eco-green jobs, 54–56  
 Economic challenges, 18–19, 22  
 Edison, Thomas A., 55, 76, 188, 195  
 Ehrenreich, Barbara, 171  
 Einstein, Albert, 16, 113  
 Emerson, Ralph Waldo, 69, 82  
 Employees  
   empowering, 136–137  
   innovative, 37  
   lifelong, 53–54  
   older, 63–64  
   retention of, 56–57  
   sense of purpose, 41–43  
 Empowerment, 136  
 Endorphins, 155  
 Energy boosters, 186  
 Entrepreneurs, 35–36  
*The Essential Reinhold Niebuhr: Selected Essays and Addresses*, 9

- Evangelista, Linda, 67
- Exercise
- attitude and, 68–69
  - consistency in, 70–71
  - habits, 71
  - health impact of, 71
  - importance of, 65–66
- Failure
- admitting, 115–116
  - avoiding, 116
  - candor in face of, 126
  - fear of, 115
- Faith
- coping with adversity through, 95–97
  - gratitude and, 109–111
  - impact of, 10–12
  - in self, 135–136
  - sense of purpose and, 48–50
  - in the United States, 11
- Faith community
- impact of, 10–12
  - nurturing in, 49–50
  - support from, 95–96
- Family
- emotional support from, 171–172
  - influence of, 164–165
  - making time for, 166–167
  - supportive, 165–166
  - supportive, cultivating, 169–160
- Federal Reserve Bank, 99–100
- FedEx, 100
- Feelings, impostor, 62–63
- Feisty prototypers, 79–81
- Field, Sally, 64
- Fields, W. C., 94
- FlyLady, 185
- Forbes, Malcolm S., 116
- Ford, Henry, 85
- Fowler, James, 174
- Fox, Michael J., 16, 110–111
- Frankl, Viktor, 6, 40–41, 103–104, 153
- Franklin, Ben, 58, 154, 164, 183
- Free markets, 18
- Freeman, Morgan, 1
- Friends
- influence of, 164–165
  - making time for, 166–167
  - supportive, 165–166, 169
- From Victim to Victor: Cancer Patients and Their Families* (Benjamin), 155
- Fudge factors, 67, 69–70
- Future Shock* (Toffler), 54
- Gandhi, Mahatma, 130
- Gardner, Chris, 179
- Garner, John, 72
- Gates, Bill, 15
- Gelb, Michael, 115
- Gerstner, Lou, 122
- Getty, J. Paul, 54
- Gifts
- from adversity, 100–101
  - gratitude for, 103–104
  - from recyclable assets, 53–54
  - skills translation from, 10
- Global economy, 18
- Goals
- changing, 189–192
  - focusing on, 182–183
  - keeper messages and, 183
- God, belief in, 49–50
- Godin, Seth, 42
- Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von, 12, 104
- Golden Egg Awards, 126
- Goldstein, Stanley, 120
- Goodman, Joel, 152
- Gordon, Jack, 158
- Grandma Moses, 179
- Graphic Controls Corporation, 126
- Gratitude
- benefits of, 113
  - faith and, 109–111
  - for gifts, 103–104
  - for happy accidents, 102
  - for loved ones, 111–112
  - practicing, 107–108
  - virtue of, 103
- Greene, Vivian, 101
- Gretzky, Wayne, 75–76
- Grier, Rosey, 28, 144–146
- Habits, 185, 187
- Half, Robert, 115
- Happiness
- good relationships and, 168–169
  - in old age, 149
  - international survey of, 141–142
- Happy accidents, 102–103, 106–107
- Harberts, Diana, 145
- Hardie, Newt, 38
- Hayakawa, S. I., 121

- Health  
   exercise effects on, 71  
   good relationships and, 168–169  
   humor's effect of, 154–156  
   sense of purpose and, 51  
   worry's effects on, 94–95
- Health care, 33–35
- Health habits  
   benefits of, 66–68, 72  
   critical, 65–66  
   diet, 69–70  
   exercise, 68–71  
   relaxation, 72
- Helplessness. *See* Learned helplessness
- Hero, definition of, 37
- Hiebert, Carl E., 74
- Hill, Napoleon, 76, 131
- Hilton, Conrad, 75
- Hoffer, Eric, 54, 117, 141
- Holen-Hoeksema, Susan, 170
- Holmes, Oliver Wendell, 3
- Holzman, Red, 23
- Homeland Security, 99
- How to Get What You Want Now*  
   (Benjamin), 84
- Hub people, 175–176
- Humility, 23, 135–136
- Humor, sense of. *See also* Laughter  
   as attitude adjuster, 158–160  
   benefits of, 153  
   cultivating, 160–161  
   development of, 161  
   laughter *versus*, 156–157  
   networking of, 162–163  
   resiliency from, 156–157  
   as social lubricant, 158–160  
   stress relief from, 153–156
- Humphreys, Suzie, 194
- Hurricane Katrina  
   simple pleasures during, 143  
   survivors, 30–31, 33
- Huxley, Aldous, 17, 146
- Huxley, Thomas Henry, 81
- Impostor feelings, 62–63
- Inner dialogs. *See* Self-talk
- Innovation, 76, 106–107
- Jackson, Phil, 23
- James, William, 31
- Jewish faith, 109–110
- John XXIII (pope), 75
- Johnson, Francis, 108
- Jolley, Willie, 8, 22
- Jones, Charlie “Tremendous,” 148
- Jones, Del, 59
- Jones, Harold B., 35
- Jordan, Michael, 76
- Kagan, Daryn, 192
- Kaiser Permanente, 33–25
- Kane, Kate, 57
- Kato, Gen, 148
- Katzenbach, Jon R., 184
- Kay, Mary, 177
- Keeper messages  
   application of, 181  
   goals and, 183  
   key, 180  
   listening to, 191–192
- Keller, Helen, 44, 95
- Kennedy, John F., 48
- Kennedy, Rose Fitzgerald, 146
- Khosla, Vinon, 167
- King, Martin Luther, Jr., 31, 178
- Kramer, Larry, 126
- Kuzhner, Rabbi S. Harold, 16
- Labels, 26, 121–122
- Landon, Michael, 150
- Lapses, bouncing back from,  
   188–189
- Lasorda, Tommy, 14
- The Last Lecture*, 90
- Laughter, *See also* Humor  
   contagious, 160  
   emotional impact of, 153  
   health benefits of, 154–156  
   humor *versus*, 156–157  
   memories of, 163  
   physical response to, 155  
   at self, 157  
   sharing, 158–159
- Leaders  
   confidence building by, 136–137  
   contextual intelligence in, 55  
   economic challenges, 18–20  
   failure admission by, 115–116  
   focus by, 80  
   optimistic stories by, 36–38  
   problem solving role of, 125–126  
   sense of purpose and, 42–43  
   status quo and, 19–20  
   war experience and, 78–79

- Leahy, Robert J., 95  
 Learned helplessness, 6–7, 29  
 Learned optimism, 6–8, 84–85  
*Learned Optimism* (Seligman), 40, 73, 84  
*Learned Optimism and Authentic Happiness* (Seligman), 7  
 Learning  
   culture of, 114  
   from disappointment, 16–15  
   from experience, 98–100  
   goal changes and, 189–192  
   from mistakes, 120–121, 125, 128  
   new insights from, 190  
   opportunities, 114  
   strategic advantage of, 56–57, 59  
   success and, 23  
*Let Your Life Speak* (Palmer), 165  
 Letterman, Elmer, 176  
 Levitt, Leon, 63  
 Lewis, C. S., 183  
 Liddell, Eric, 76  
 Life  
   difficulty of, 2–3, 14–15  
   optimism's impact on, 9–10  
   significant events in, 47–48  
   simply approach to, 108–109  
   ups-and-downs in, 23–24  
 Lifelong learning  
   benefits of, 64  
   challenges in, 63  
   impostor feelings and, 62–63  
   skills development and, 53–54  
 Lincoln, Abraham, 22, 81–82, 110  
 Listening skills, 178  
 Livingstone, David, 96  
 Loneliness, 172  
 Lord Chesterton, 139  
 Lucado, Max, 87  
 Lucas, George, 191  
 Luther, Martin, 72  
 Luttwak, Edward, 18  
 LUV reports, 37–38  
  
 Mackay, Harvey, 172–174  
 Mackey, John, 195  
 Maddi, Salvatore, 51  
 Maguire, Francis, 99  
 Makarova, Natalie, 128  
*Making Change Work*, 59  
  
*Man's Search for Meaning* (Frankl), 40–41, 103  
 May, Rollo, 153  
 Mayo, Anthony, 55  
 McCarthy, Dennis, 103  
 McCormack, Mark, 174  
 McGarvey, Robert, 59  
 McGinnis, Gary, 164  
 McNeil, Ian, 19–20  
 Memories  
   laughter-laced, 163  
   lists of, 150–151  
   motivation and, 188–189  
 Mickelson, Phil, 187  
 Micron Technology, 25–26  
 Miller, William Ian, 99, 193  
 Milliken, 80–81  
 Milliken Gazelle Award, 81  
 Mission  
   faith-driven, 48–49  
   meaningful, 46–47  
   statements, 42  
 Mistakes  
   corrective action for, 125–126  
   hidden, 124–125  
   learning from, 114–117, 126–128  
   responsibility for, 123–124  
 Mitchell, W., 98, 188  
 Mother Teresa, 44, 51, 96  
 Motivation  
   intrinsic, 44  
   management of, 130  
   memories and, 188–189  
 Music, 146  
*The Mystery of Courage* (Miller), 193  
  
 Namath, Joe, 91  
 Navajo Song, 144  
 Needlepoint, 144–146  
 Nelms, David, 123  
 Networking, 174–176  
 Newman, Toni, 166  
 News coverage, 27–29, 104–106  
 Nichols, Jack, 132–133, 137  
 Niebuhr, Reinhold, 9, 198  
 Nietzsche, Friedrich, 139  
 Nightingale, Earl, 59  
 Nisker, Wes Scoop, 29  
 Nixon, Richard, 2  
 Nolan, Rebeca, 135

- Ogden, Frank, 52
- One Minute Manager* (Blanchard), 10–11, 130
- One-liners, 160–161
- Opportunity, 60–61
- The Optimistic Life* (Marden), 191
- Optimism Advantage Blog*, 192
- Optimism Quote, 192
- Organizations, 20
  - downsizing, 18
  - elderly employees at, 64
  - employee recruitment, 43
  - evolution of, 80
  - launching, 37
  - learning, 56–57
  - leaving, 57–59
  - purpose for, 41–42, 47
  - telling story of, 37
  - torchbearers in, 42
- Overcoming the Odds* (Werner), 169–170
- Pace, Peter, 78
- Pagels, Douglas, 112
- Paige, Satchel, 171
- Paine, Katie Delahaye, 125
- Palmer, Parker, 165
- Parton, Dolly, 65
- Pascale, Richard, 20
- Patient active health, 33–35
- Patton, George, 2
- Pausch, Randy, 111, 127
- Peale, Norman Vincent, 21, 81–82, 100, 196
- Peck, M. Scott, 14
- Pelz, Dave, 187
- Perch, Ian, 61
- Perfection, action *versus*, 81–82
- Performance, 77–78
- Perlman, Itzhak, 93
- Persistence
  - in actions, 77–78
  - application of, 197
  - benefits of, 116–117
  - control of, 24
  - development of, 6–7
  - personal change and, 195–198
  - success and, 76–77, 196
- Personal change
  - achieving, 180
  - calendar use in, 183–184
  - careers and, 60, 62
  - cultivation of, 179
  - enduring, 181–182
  - ensuring, 181
  - goals and, 182–183
  - inspiring stories of, 192–193
  - persistence and, 195–198
  - progress, celebrating, 193–195
  - stepped progress in, 184–186
  - striving for, 196–198
  - support system for, 186
  - visual imagery and, 187–188
- Personal Character and National Destiny* (Jones), 35
- Pet therapy, 146–148
- Peter, Laurence, 156
- Peters, Tom, 57, 79–80, 190
- Piazza, Mike, 185–186
- Picasso, Pablo, 62
- Pickford, Mary, 188
- Pits people
  - avoiding, 169–171
  - defined, 104
  - responding to, 104
- Plotnikoff, Gregory A., 45
- Polaris Ventures, 126
- Pope John Paul XXIII, 198
- Popper, Karl, 32
- Position, 77–78
- Positive psychology, 7–8
- Possibilitarian, 17, 100
- “The Post-It Story,” 37
- Povejsil, Donald, 42
- Poverty, 35–36
- Powell, Colin, 10
- Prager, Dennis, 102, 134, 146
- Prahalad, C. K., 43
- Problem solving, 124, 125–126
- Professional life
  - characterization of, 123
  - finding purpose in, 46–47
  - optimism’s impact on, 9–10
- Progress, 193–195, 197
- Publilius Syrus, 145
- Purpose, sense of
  - faith and, 48–50
  - finding, 44–45
  - healthy lifestyle and, 51
  - for leaders, 41–43
  - meaningful missions and, 46–47
  - overview, 39–40

- Purpose, sense of (*continued*)
  - secular service and, 50–51
  - in service to others, 40–41
  - tragedies and, 47–48
  - in workplace, 43–45
- Radio Deportes de Caracol, 105
- Rand, Ayn, 36
- Rausch, Randy, 90
- Reading, benefits of, 148–149
- Reagan, Ronald, 98, 137
- Recyclable assets
  - attitude, 60–61
  - employee development, 56–57
  - options as, 57–58
  - overview, 52–53
  - trends and, 54–56
  - updating gifts into, 53–54
  - volunteering, 58–59
- Reed, Nick, 106
- Relationships. *See also* Family; Friends
  - advantage of, 178
  - building, problem solving and, 124
  - catalysts for, 176
  - cultivating, 10
  - developing, 172–174
  - energy boosting, 186
  - good, effects of, 168–169
  - healthy, 4
  - listening skills and, 178
  - networking, 174–176
  - renewing/revitalizing, 176–178
  - salespeople and, 175
- Relaxation, 72
- Resilience
  - through adversity, 32, 37
  - confidence and, 138
  - control of, 24
  - development of, 6–7
  - study of, 169–170
- Resilience at Work: How to Succeed No Matter What Life Throws at You* (Maddi), 51
- Resilient survivors
  - behavior of, 30
  - characterization of, 26–27, 38
  - description of, 26–27
  - economic opportunities and, 35
  - Hurricane Katrina examples, 30–31
  - news coverage of, 29
  - post-9/11 examples, 31–33
- Resolve, 188–189
- Resourcefulness
  - control of, 24
  - development of, 6–7
  - success and, 76–77
- Responsibility, 123–124
- Reuters, 105
- Riis, Jacob, 196
- Riley, Pat, 121
- Rippe, James, 69
- The Road Less Traveled* (Peck), 14
- Robb, John, 176
- Robert, Cavett, 98
- Rogers, Fred, 165
- Rogers, Will, 73
- Rohn, Jim, 88
- Rooney, Andy, 84, 89
- Roosevelt, Eleanor, 138
- Roosevelt, Theodore, 114, 137
- Ruth, Babe, 76
- Sager, Ira, 116
- Saint Francis of Assisi, 184
- Saint Ignatius, 96
- Salameh, Weeled A., 155
- Salespeople
  - approval needs of, 119
  - effective, 85
  - humor use by, 159
  - persistent, 17, 76
  - relationships in, 175
- Sanborn, Mark, 129, 138, 141–142, 182
- Santa, Carlos, 105
- Schultz, Howard, 195
- Schwartz, Morrie, 47
- Schweitzer, Albert, 40, 165
- Secrets of Life Every Teenager Needs to Know*, 17
- Secular service, 50–51
- Selekman, Benjamin, 86
- Self
  - forgiving, 121
  - laughing at, 157
  - love for, 120
  - support, 129, 134
  - valuing, 137–138
- Self-analysis, 117
- Self-confidence. *See also* Self-confidence
  - academic achievement and, 134–135
  - action and, 82

- definition of, 117
- developing, 138
- effective, 134
- employees', 136–137
- instilling, 136–137
- nurturing, 132–133
- realistic, 135, 138
- sustainable, 135
- Self-criticism
  - approval dependency and, 118–119
  - as correction data, 120–121
  - effects of, 117–118
  - future-focused approach to, 122–123
  - label-avoidance in, 121–122
  - script for, 127
- Self-esteem, 135–136
- Self-feedback, 130
- Self-reliance, 4
- Self-talk
  - ABCs of, 85–87
  - adversity and, 85–86
  - argument in, 88
  - factual, 88–81
  - ineffective, 84
  - personal change and, 187–188
  - reality-based, 84–85
- Seligman, Martin E. P., 100
  - about, 7
  - on confidence building, 132
  - on positive attitudes, 40
  - on religion, 11
  - on self-talk, 84–85, 88
- September 11 attacks, 31–33, 99
- Serenity Prayer, 9
- Serrano, John J., 140
- Shakespeare, William, 110, 157
- Shaw, George Bernard, 50, 78, 83, 114
- Sherman, Patsy, 106
- Shula, Don, 93
- Simple pleasures
  - attitude impacting, 140–141
  - costs of, 141–142
  - everyday examples of, 142–143, 149–150
  - memories of, 150–151
  - music as, 146
  - in nature, 143–144
  - overview, 139–140
  - pets as, 146–148
  - reading as, 148–149
  - therapeutic, 144–146
- Smith, Fred, 79
- Southwest Airlines, 37
- Stanislavsky, Constantin, 119
- Stanton, Sybil, 70
- Status quo, 19–20
- Steinman, Craig, 56
- Stepped progress, 184–186
- Stevenson, Harold, 134
- Steyn, Mark, 13
- Stigler, James, 134
- Stress, 19, 153–156
- Success
  - contextual intelligence and, 55
  - corporate examples of, 37–38
  - defining, 4
  - economic, 18, 20–23
  - failure and, 75–77
  - humility in, 23
  - leadership and, 56
  - lifelong learning and, 53
  - paths to, 106–107
- Survivors. *See* Resilient survivors
- Swanson, Bill, 162
- Swift, Jonathan, 122, 143
- Swindoll, Charles, 119
- Tandy, Jessica, 119
- Tecumseh, 109
- Their Time: The Great Business Leaders of the 20th Century* (Mayo), 55
- Therapy
  - crafts as, 144–146
  - humor, 155
  - pet, 146–148
  - writing as, 127
- Thomas, Ken, 44
- Thoreau, Henry David, 189
- Tiner, Stan, 31
- Toffler, Alvin, 54
- Tolstoy, Leo, 117
- Tomlin, Lily, 167
- Torchbearers, 42
- Tragedies, overcoming, 47–48
- Trends, capitalizing on, 54–55
- Truman, Harry, 24
- Turbo Capitalism* (Luttwak), 18
- Twain, Mark, 25
  - on cheer, 51
  - on compliments, 131
  - on friends, 164
  - on future needs, 55

## 210 Index

- Twain, Mark (*continued*)  
  on habits, 185  
  on humor, 152
- Unemployment, 59–60
- United States  
  poverty in, 35–36  
  religion in, 11  
  weight loss in, 66
- Victims, 6, 26–27, 38
- Volunteering, 58–59
- Waitley, Dennis, 197
- Walden, Russ, 163
- Walker, Al, 66
- Wanamaker, John, 71
- War, experience of, 78–79
- Watson, Thomas J., Sr., 116
- Wedderburn, John, 147
- Welles, Edward O., 37
- Werner, Emmy, 169–170
- What's Possible* (Kagan), 192
- White, Paul Dudley, 68
- Why Pride Matters More Than Money*  
  (Katzenbach), 184
- Wilkerson, Bud, 70–71
- Williams, Pat, 189
- Williams, Roy, 50
- Williamson, Marianne, 107
- Witt, Reni L., 197
- Women Who Think Too Much*  
  (Holen-Hoeksema), 170
- Wooden, John, 50, 53, 75,  
  77
- Woods, Tiger, 5, 122–123
- Woolcott, Alexander, 197
- Work-life balance, 10
- Worry, effects of, 94–95
- Writing, therapeutic, 127
- Y2K challenge, 99
- Yow, Kay, 90
- Ziglar, Zig, 181



---

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

---

Terry Paulson is a PhD psychologist, honored professional speaker, national columnist, and celebrated author. He brings knowledge, humor, and a refreshingly unique approach to every presentation and book he writes. With over 30 years of experience in conducting practical programs on optimism and change for such companies as IBM, 3M, Boston Scientific, HBO, KPMG, Kaiser Permanente, Sony, Starbucks, Verizon, Wal-Mart, and hundreds of hospitals, universities, and associations, Dr. Paulson helps organizations, leaders, and teams *make change work!*

He's the author of the popular books: *They Shoot Managers Don't They*; *Making Humor Work*; and *Leadership Truths One Story at a Time*. He is a "Distinguished Faculty Member" for the Institute for Management Studies and a past president of both the National Speakers Association and the Global Speakers Federation. He's been inducted as a lifetime member of NSA's CPAE Speakers Hall of Fame, along with Ronald Reagan, Colin Powell, and Norman Vincent Peale, an honor given to less than 200 speakers worldwide.

Terry's tasteful humor and down-to-earth insights have earned him a deserved reputation as one of the nation's best authors and keynote speakers. That's why *Business Digest* calls him "the Will Rogers of management consultants."

Visit [www.terrypaulson.com](http://www.terrypaulson.com) to learn more about Dr. Paulson. Share your comments at [www.OptimismAdvantage.com](http://www.OptimismAdvantage.com).

—Terry L. Paulson, PhD, CSP, CPAE,  
Paulson and Associates, Inc. Agoura Hills, CA  
(800)-521-6172 • (818)-991-5110

# Acquire Optimism and Change Your Life On and Off the Job

Wouldn't you rather be an optimist than a pessimist? In the good and the tough times, this book provides you with a road map to an optimistic outlook that works. Learn how to turn your anxiety and worries into attitudes and actions that produce results. You'll refer to this book over and over again to master the simple but powerful truths optimists live by.

**Discover how easy it is to:**

- **Stop being your own worst enemy and become your best supporter**
- **Manage your own motivation instead of being dependent on others**
- **Experience more peaks and fewer valleys**
- **Make today count by turning adversity into opportunities**
- **Become a problem solver instead of a problem evader**
- **Foster optimism in those you lead and live with**
- **Take your life choices seriously and yourself lightly**

"Masterful! *The Optimism Advantage* supports the thesis that we control our attitude and our actions. Live every chapter of this book, and you're more likely to have a great life of happiness and achievement!"

—**Don Hutson, coauthor of the #1 *New York Times* bestseller, *The One Minute Entrepreneur*, and CEO, U.S. Learning Inc.**

"This is a must-read for any leader committed to producing results in both good and bad times."

—**Gordon Peters, CEO and Founding Chairman, Institute for Management Studies**

"Terry Paulson goes beyond hyperbole and hype to address the principles and practices of optimism."

—**Mark Sanborn, leadership expert and author of *The Fred Factor* and *The Encore Effect***

"*The Optimism Advantage* collects Dr. Paulson's wisdom and insights into a resource that belongs in every library. Don't just read it once; read it until it sinks into how you live and lead! This book is a true *keeper*!"

—**Terry L. Bream, RN, MN, Ambulatory Clinical Practice Administrator, Kaiser Permanente**

"While others may be swept into fear, frustration, and uncertainty, this breakthrough book gives you practical tools to leverage the Optimism Advantage. BUY this book; a more rewarding and significant life awaits."

—**Dr. Joseph Michelli, CEO, The Michelli Experience, and author of *The Starbucks Experience* and *The New Gold Standard***

Dr. Terry Paulson is a psychologist, a hall-of-fame speaker, and a leading authority on turning positive psychology research into practical insights and commonsense truths that are easy to learn and sure to produce real-world results.

**Claim your Optimism Advantage! It's practical. It works! What are you waiting for?**

